



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 01 | JANUARY 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

DFO Facebook photogs'
favorite pix of 2023

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Final winter before harsh
new reality at ranch

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Common Goldeneye
Belmar Park, Lakewood
Rob Raker



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental

scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

It's called "common," but this goldeneye is uncommonly striking

It's goldeneye time in lakes, ponds and stretches of river all along the Front Range. One of our most reliably present and conspicuous winter ducks, the Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), is back. Bright-eyed (the color is generally called amber) and duck-tailed, these birds are down from their far northern forest breeding grounds (tree cavities across Canada and Alaska most suit their nesting needs) to while away the off-months diving for crustaceans, fish and mollusks and parading around like their foppish dandy cousins, the Hooded Mergansers.

For a bird that's predominantly black and white, this one sure knows how to show it off. That unearthly shimmer of green on the male's large, triangular head – wait, it's purple sometimes, too, isn't it? – and the round white cheek patch really set off those prominent, all-seeing eyes. (Our cover photograph by frequent contributor **Rob Raker**, taken at Belmar Park's Kountze Lake in January 2022, really captures that amber gaze, doesn't it?) And the chocolate-headed female — yes, chocolate; isn't that delicious? — has those eyes (though more yellow-white) plus a yellow tip on her black bill.

I could watch for hours (and have on occasion) as these overwinterers repeatedly splash-dive beneath the half-iced surface of Denver City Park's Duck Lake. They usually emerge a few tries later grasping crayfish in their bills. The prey flail their tiny claws as the birds shake them furiously into submission before swallowing. Not for nothing does Cornell's *Birds of the World* describe Common Goldeneyes as "cold-hardy."

And if they're away from a usual haunt when you first go looking, they'll announce themselves with a whistle when they return. Not from their mouths, but off wings that whistle as they fast-flap. It's an old hunter nickname for the species: "whistlers."

Common Goldeneyes breed across Eurasia's northern tier, too, making their presence widespread throughout the northern half of the globe. Fun fact: Goldeneye chicks leave those tree-cavity nests (and human-built nestboxes, too) only a day after they hatch. The goldeneye mom calls up from the base of the tree and, one after another, they tumble out in freefall like parachutists from an airplane. Once down and off to water, the chicks can feed themselves but rely on adults — their own mothers but sometimes others in multibrood groups — for protection.

Although we don't get to see those juvenile antics up north, we do witness the courtship displays of Common Goldeneye males down here in winter and early spring. Their repertoire includes more than a dozen complex bobs, kicks, feints, head-jerks and other moves to attract prospective female mates.

Fortunately, Common Goldeneye populations are relatively steady. But given their need for boreal forest nesting habitat and the invertebrate prey that live there, climate change and other environmental disruptions up north could change that in the future.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



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The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO AdBIRDtisements are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor Patrick O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Sunday, Dec. 31



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A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

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zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

DFVs — Denver Field Volunteers — make DFO work . . . come see how we run

Sharon Tinianow

DFO runs on volunteer power. We have said this many times, but it is worth repeating. I hope you will consider joining our volunteer ranks in 2024 so Denver Field Ornithologists can keep doing what we do so well.

In lieu of an end-of-the-year message, let me cut to the chase with an earnest look-ahead to the DFO volunteer opportunities (and some urgent needs) we have for the coming year.

COMMITTEE WORK

Planning and organizing DFO's many activities is mostly the work of eight standing committees: **Field Trips, Hawk Watch, Conservation, Grants, Communications & Outreach (C&O), Finance, Nominations, and Membership.** These working groups typically have at least three members but often five to seven; generally they meet four times a year, though there's no rule about it. Any DFO member can volunteer to serve on any committee. From time to time, the DFO Board of Directors creates ad hoc committees to address a particular need for a limited period of time. Right now, we have an ad hoc Fundraising Committee.

FIELD TRIPS

The Field Trips committee is responsible for our largest pool of volunteers: DFO field trip leaders. Trip leaders go through training and certification and then lead as many outings as they are able to manage.

HAWK WATCH

The Hawk Watch committee manages our next largest pool of volunteers: the people who participate in DFO's six-week annual spring count of migrating raptors from atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County.

DFO BOARD AND OFFICERS

The DFO Board comprises 11 to 13 directors elected to three-year terms by the membership. It meets quarterly to oversee club policy and activity. Also on the board are DFO's elected officers — president, vice president, secretary and treasurer — who serve one-year terms and can be re-elected (as can board directors).



Club officers lead board discussion on DFO goals
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 6

In addition to our committee members, board and officers are individual roles like DFO's Monthly Program Manager and *Lark Bunting* Editor. These individual volunteers report directly to the DFO Board.

To learn more about the board, officers, committees and volunteer opportunities, visit the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/DFO.aspx>.

MORE VOLUNTEER ROLES

Other DFO tasks require volunteers, too. To find brief descriptions of those volunteer roles and to fill out an online form to indicate your interest, click here: <https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx>. DFO provides training for all volunteer roles, so the only real requirement is that the position interests you. If you want to ask a committee chair more about volunteering, or if you want to contract a board member directly, go to this website link for their email contacts: <https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Leadership.aspx>

URGENT VOLUNTEER NEEDS

Here are several volunteer positions DFO needs to fill soon. All of them are new, which means you could shape one of these roles to suit your abilities and fit your time available. Read on and consider joining in!

- **Social Media coordinator** — As a member of the C&O Committee, this person promotes DFO events with posts to the DFO Facebook group, the DFO Instagram account, and Colorado Field Ornithologists' statewide COBirds Google group. Experience with social media and the ability to post at least weekly are expected
- **Assistant Programs manager** — This new position assists the Monthly Programs manager with various elements of the monthly evening programs (August through November, January through April) that DFO produces via webinars. Ability to write newsletter preview articles about programs and to post program information on the DFO website are desired
- **Volunteer coordinator** — This key new role helps DFO recruit and train volunteers and recognize volunteer efforts at an annual appreciation event. These tasks require excellent people skills as well as experience working with volunteers

As you read this, DFO is wrapping up the fall membership and donation drive. But please consider further how you might support DFO with the most important gift of all: your volunteer time and energy. And please, feel free to contact me directly with your questions at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

Happy birding,

— **Sharon**



Western Meadowlark
Gary Gulakowski



Double-crested cormorant
Ginny and Gary Gulakowski

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

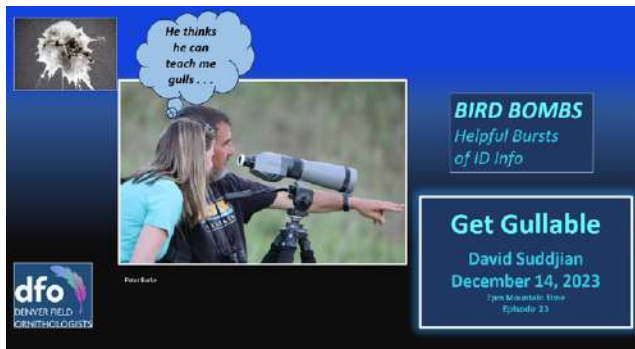
DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

NO FOOLING: "GET GULL-ABLE" IS DEC. 14 BIRD BOMBS TOPIC

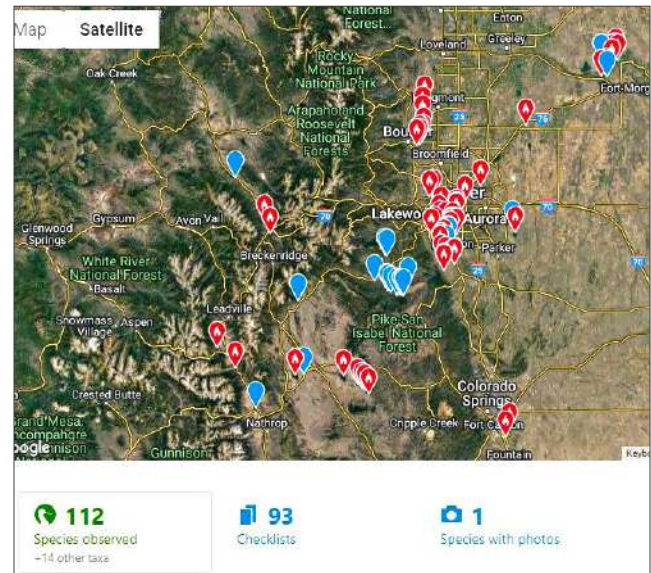
Register now on the [DFO website](https://dfobirds.org) for the next DFO "BIRD BOMBS" bird ID mini-webinar on Thursday, Dec. 14, at 7 p.m. MST. Gulls comprise one of the most diverse and challenging bird groups. Who hasn't heard another birder (or maybe themselves) say, "One day I'll tackle gulls." This is that day, with basics of gull ID with a Colorado flair, just as we move into our best gull season. You, too, can be *Gull-able*! In the meantime, the Zoom video of the most recent BIRD BOMBS episode, "Prairie Hawks," is available for viewing along with 21 other previous episodes on the DFO webpage at <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/BirdBombs.aspx>.



WHERE DID DFO GO BIRDING IN NOVEMBER?

DFO had another busy field trip month in November, with 22 outings led by 13 trip leaders on 16 different calendar days. You can review the club's November 2023 eBird trip report here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/169897>. The trips ranged from Boulder to El Paso counties, out east to Morgan County and up into the mountains in several more. DFO birders found a combined total of 112 species and submitted 93 eBird checklists. As always, you can check out and sign up for

outings on DFO's field trip calendar at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>.



KID BIRDERS! BIRD CONSERVANCY'S WINTER CAMP IS DEC. 27-29

If you're looking for something for your kids and grandkids to do on winter break, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies plans a Birds of Winter Camp Dec. 27-29 at the conservancy's [Environmental Learning Center](https://www.birdconservancy.org) in Brighton (north shore of Barr Lake). The camp for children ages 6-10 will run 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. Day campers will focus each day on different aspects of birds and bird conservation: Waterfowl walks around Barr Lake, Bald Eagle observation, lesson in using GPS, and playing lots of camp games. The camp will be open for single-day registration or all three days. On the final day, Friday Dec. 29, the conservancy welcomes the whole family to camp with special programming to engage everyone. For more camp details and how to register, visit the conservancy's website at <https://www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/education/colorado-programs/birdcamps/daycamps/#>. Birds of Winter Camp is found under the "Day Camps" subsection.

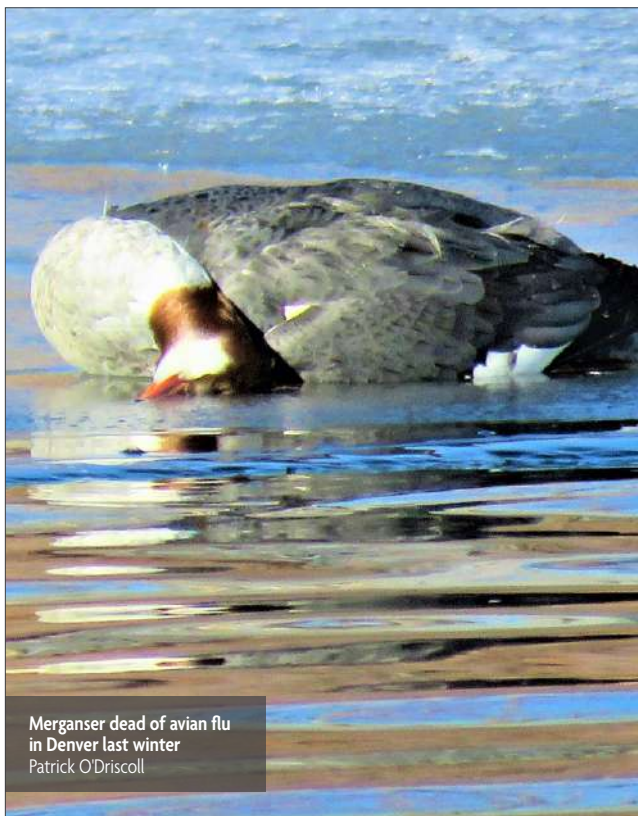
IS AVIAN INFLUENZA COMING BACK TO COLORADO THIS WINTER?

After subsiding over the warmer late spring, summer and early fall months, reports of confirmed cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) — better known as bird flu

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— have begun to show up in the [Colorado Department of Agriculture database](#). Of eight instances reported so far since mid-October, just four confirmed reports involve wild birds: A Great Horned Owl in Pueblo County (Oct. 27), a Common Raven in Gunnison County (Nov. 14), a Common Raven in Weld County (Nov. 20), and a Canada Goose in Weld (Nov. 28). The other bird flu cases so far have involved domestic backyard waterfowl and a game bird facility (Bent, Nov. 30), domestic chickens (Morgan, Nov. 29), and mixed backyard species (Weld, Oct. 12, and Montrose, Nov. 13).

Last year, avian flu decimated domestic chicken flocks in Colorado and other states, but loss of wild birds was mostly confined to geese and other waterfowl, and mostly individual birds. Since early 2022, cases have been confirmed in about 20 species of wild birds, from raptors and corvids to geese and ducks. In response to a query from DFO member **Ginni Dickinson** on Dec. 1, Colorado Parks & Wildlife reported “some . . . detections in Colorado waterfowl. We expect to see more cases in birds, and also mammals.” CPW asks that Denver area birders who see “additional sick animals” in the field report their sightings to CPW at 303-291-7227.



Merganser dead of avian flu in Denver last winter
Patrick O'Driscoll

BELMAR PARK APARTMENT PROJECT OPPONENTS STAND UP DEC. 11

Save Belmar Park, a Lakewood nonprofit group opposed to disruption of wildlife habitat, increased traffic and other negative effects of a proposed 412-unit apartment complex next to Belmar Park, hopes to rally opponents at the Lakewood City Council's Dec. 11 meeting. The group says Kairoi Developers plans a six-story apartment building with five-floor parking garage at 777 S. Yarrow St., with a “footprint” the width of two football fields right beside the popular public park and haven for numerous breeding and migratory bird species. It hopes to pack the Dec. 11 council meeting (7 p.m., 480 S. Allison Parkway, Lakewood) with opponents. The meeting also will be Zoom-cast (<https://lakewood.zoom.us/j/87017960123>) or via city government's Lakewood Speaks online channel at <https://lakewoodspeaks.org/>. For more information on the issue and a petition against the project, visit the group's website at www.savebelmarpark.com.

BARR LAKE VEGETATION / HABITAT DAMAGE UPDATE

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies reports that it met recently with the irrigation company that owns Barr Lake “to discuss mitigating damage to critical bird habitat” at the reservoir and state park. Work along the lake's shore, berm and ditch by Farmers Reservoir and Irrigation Co. (FRICO) is “expected to take place over the next couple of years and extend along a large segment of the eastern shoreline,” the conservancy reports. “They are removing trees that are close to the berm, vegetation in the ditch and changing the slope of the berm and adding riprap for bank stabilization.”

The sudden disruption and tearing out of vegetation earlier this year alarmed and outraged birders and other park-goers, and bird-related organizations including DFO spoke out about the damage. Since then, the conservancy — whose headquarters and a 35-year bird banding station are at Barr Lake — has been discussing measures to limit harmful effects to birds and habitat. The conservancy has banded and released more than 45,000 birds of 123 species at Barr Lake, which it calls “an invaluable stopover for migratory and resident birds.”

Continued on page 9

“FRICO has agreed to work with Colorado Parks & Wildlife and us to minimize the impact on the habitat and the upcoming spring migration season and assist with revegetation over the next several years as well as helping mitigate the loss of large trees with nesting platforms,” the conservancy reports. “This will include looking at planting shrubs and other native, water-loving plants along the shoreline to help with nesting and migratory bird habitat.” The conservancy thanked “the bird and conservation community and our partners with Colorado Field Ornithologists, Denver Field Ornithologists (DFO), Audubon, Wild Birds Unlimited-Fort Collins, Longmont and Denver area stores, individuals and other organizations who are raising their voices and providing awareness for this critical place for birds.”

DFO SEQUEL TRIP TO AZ SKY ISLANDS SET FOR MAY 2024

After the success of his 12-day driving field trip in 2023 to southeastern Arizona’s fabled “Sky Islands,” veteran trip leader **Joey Kellner** plans another such excursion this coming May 15-26, 2024. This “moderate” difficult

expedition (early mornings and/or late evenings, long drives, hiking in habitat) will cover one of the continent’s premier birding destinations, with habitats from Chihuahuan desert grasslands to shaded oak and sycamore canyons to the upper Sonoran Desert and the mountaintop sky islands themselves. Expect bountiful sightings of birds and wildlife not found in Colorado. The trip “is designed especially for those that have never been to this area of the country, but anyone except the past 2023 participants is eligible,” Kellner said. Kellner will lead seven other participants. Signing up involves a random drawing from among all who are interested, who must first sign up via the usual DFO field trip registration process on the club website. All-inclusive cost is \$2,600 (rental vehicles, lodging, gas and food, leader’s expenses and land/access fees). Unspent funds at trip’s end will be refunded to participants. Registration on the DFO website opens **Dec. 15**, and the random selection will take place a month later, **Jan. 15, 2024**. Questions? Contact Kellner at vireol@comcast.net. A detailed itinerary with locations and potential species is viewable at https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/Documents/AZ_Trip_Details.pdf



Elegant Trogon in SE Arizona
Rob Raker

DFO SEEKING TWO EXPERIENCED HAWK COUNTERS FOR DINO RIDGE

Denver Field Ornithologists is seeking two experienced hawk counters for the upcoming spring 2024 Hawk Watch migration count atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. For details visit the Ornithology Exchange website's [short-term jobs page](#).



Tami Bulow

SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow

Monday, January 22, 2024

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

A birding adventure to deep South Texas can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding trips in the continental US. Owing to its famous, border-defining river, the Lower Rio Grande Valley actually lies farther south than one-third of Mexico. That accident of political geography offers the opportunity to find vagrant bird rarities from Mexico on a regular basis, as well as the more than 500 species of birds that migrate seasonally through the area or call it home.

Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-2007) calls it home, too. Before moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to manage the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, she worked as manager of conferences, conventions and tours for Colorado-based [American Birding Association](#). Now retired, Bulow lives in the border city of Harlingen, TX but continues to dabble in birding work.

In her free evening Zoom presentation on Jan. 22, “Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More,” Bulow says she will reveal “five places that are a must visit” for birders, “and another 30 or 40 that won’t disappoint.” She also says there are “15-20 specialties that you must come to the Rio Grande Valley for if you want them on your North American List.” Birds like Great Kiskadee and Green Jay, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Altamira Oriole, Grove-billed Ani and Green Kingfisher.

Bulow has more advice: “Spring migration is best, but a mild winter can’t be beat for delightful birding. Top tip: Avoid summer. You will thank me later.”

Although she was born in Boston, Bulow’s family moved around — Connecticut, Denver, Richmond, Atlanta. “Twelve

schools in 12 years,” she says. “Mom was a backyard birder, so I grew up filling feeders and calling out birds that were feeding there. When I got my first house, the first thing I did was hang a bird feeder, and then chuckled to myself, ‘I must be a birder!’ ”

She returned to Colorado as a student at the University of Denver and worked after graduation at local ice arenas, managing the DU Arena and its youth sports program. Later, her travel as a sales rep for skate maker Riedell Skates “fed my birding addiction.”

Still later, a transfer to Albuquerque led her to start “Thursday Birders” there — like Denver’s own Tuesday Birders weekly meetup. She would become president of Central New Mexico Audubon Society and VP of the state Audubon organization. She says that prepared her to be DFO president after she moved back to Denver.

Left jobless after years with ABA, she applied to be director of South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center in Texas and landed the job. During her years in south Texas, she also managed nature tourism for Chambers County east of Houston and as executive director of the Texas Tropical Trail region for the Texas Historical Commission.

Today she writes grants for Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival (Port Canaveral, FL), “But basically I am retired,” she says, though she does “some bird guiding” at local festivals and privately, and volunteers for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. A Texas Master Naturalist, she is working on learning the butterflies and plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Gardening on the Wild Side

Jim Tolstrup

Monday, February 26, 2024

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Look for registration information for this Zoom presentation in the next issue of The Lark Bunting

Join award-winning Colorado landscape designer/horticulturist **Jim Tolstrup**, director of the [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland, for a backyard garden-inspiring presentation focused on the relationship between native plants and wildlife. Tolstrup founded the center 20 years ago to promote wildlife-friendly landscape design and maintenance practices. The 275-acre center describes itself as “a unique model for preserving native biodiversity on the midst of development.”

Located in the heart of the Centerra planned community between Boyd Lake SP and the Interstate 25 corridor, the center is tucked between two habitat-rich reservoirs on the northeast side of Loveland in Larimer County. It contains a native-plant demonstration garden, heritage orchard, community veggie garden, workshops, educational programs, and greenhouses where it grows thousands of native plant seedlings for sale and distribution across northern Colorado and the Front Range. Centerra’s developers call the center their “nature spirit guide.” They boast that the community has been certified by the National Wildlife Federation as Colorado’s only Community Wildlife Habitat.

Tolstrup is author of [Suburbitat: A Guide to Restoring Nature Where We Live, Work, and Play](#), a book about the center’s efforts to bring native landscapes into everyday neighborhoods. He previously served as land steward of Shambhala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes, CO. He also ran his own landscape design business in Kennebunkport, ME, where he installed gardens at the “Summer White House” of **George** and **Barbara Bush**.

Tolstrup holds a certificate in gardening arts from the Landscape Institute of Harvard University and the Arnold Arboretum and has received awards for landscape design from Plant Select®, American Society of Landscape Architects, Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, and Denver Water. He teaches widely throughout Colorado, has written numerous articles on gardening and environmental stewardship.

To view more about the center and its work in advance of Tolstrup’s presentation, visit High Plains Environmental Center’s [YouTube page](#), which has a dozen videos, including [this explainer on Tolstrup’s “Suburbitat” concept](#).



MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's October program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for curating and posting the program videos on the DFO website on the [Past Programs](#) page.



Jonaitis (left) and Clements (right)

NOVEMBER 27

Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

WATCH ONLINE

Representatives of Tropical Audubon, the National Audubon chapter for greater Miami, gave a comprehensive overview and update on the status of South Florida's fabled “River of Grass,” the Everglades. Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements** told of the Everglades' rich, bizarre and unbelievable history of land booms, hydraulic replumbing, droughts, hurricanes, and invasions by all manner of exotic species. A relatively young ecosystem (5,000 years) of nine different and distinct habitats, the Everglades once reached from present-day Orlando all the way to Florida's southern tip. Although only a remnant remains today, dogged restoration efforts keep the worst at bay. Senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** gave updates on all the current threats and challenges to the Everglades, including the alarming proliferation of exotic non-native plants and animals. During Q&A, Clements noted that exploding population densities of the insatiable Burmese Python are so “insane” that in places, “You could be standing on top of a python and not know it.”

TROPICAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Preservation & Restoration Begins

- Florida Water Resources Act
- Big Cypress National Preserve & Biscayne National Park
- Kissimmee River Restoration Project
- Clean Water Act & Warren Henderson Act
- Wetland of International Importance
- Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Act
- Florida's Everglades Protection Act
- SFWMD backfill plan for Kissimmee River
- Water Resources Development Act (1992)

Roseate Spoonbill and Wood Stork, Photo: John Studwell

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Or for monthly programs by exceptional speakers . . .
Or to sharpen our birding skills in workshops . . .
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Our strength is in BELONGING and in SHARING —
in our love for birds and their place among us . . .
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Chico Basin Ranch gateway
Patrick O'Driscoll

CONSERVATION

Chico Basin Ranch: Open to birding until late winter — then harsh new rules apply

Patrick O'Driscoll

The quiet season has begun at Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties. The last autumn migrants have skedaddled south after pit stops at one of Colorado's richest habitats for birds — and one of its friendliest locales for birding.

Behind the scenes, however, this winter at Chico Basin may be a quiet madhouse. The current family-owned cattle operation at the state-owned ranch is losing its longtime lease and must vacate by the end of 2024, when a different family livestock outfit takes over. At the same time, the bird-related organization closest geographically to the prairie grassland ranch — Aiken Audubon, National Audubon's chapter in

Colorado Springs — must create and administer an entirely new, tightly controlled system for limited birding starting next spring.

Chico Basin's new reality formally begins in less than three months. On Feb. 29, 2024, the ranch's famously open gate will close for good to all birding outside of narrow, five-week periods during spring and fall migration. (The only exception: A team of Aiken birders will be allowed on the property one day in each off-month to maintain a year-round count of bird species.) That February date also marks the end of casual, unfettered, spur-of-the-moment ranch visits, spoiling one of the charms of birding at Chico Basin. All future birder visits will be by pay-in-advance registration only.

Two months after that closure, on Apr. 29, the ranch will open a five-week window for spring birding. That's also the date that Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, which has long operated a Chico Basin bird banding station, will begin capturing and banding spring migrants. Banding will run through May 31. After that, birders get the ranch for two more days before the gate shuts again on June 2 until autumn.

Linda Hodges, Conservation chair of Aiken Audubon, said fall birding is scheduled for Sep. 2 through Oct. 6. That end date, too, is two days after the banding station's autumn operation closes. Aiken, which accepted a non-paying, 5-year lease to host birder visitation at Chico Basin, is now wading into logistics for setting up a new birding-access regimen.

Of keen interest to DFO is how group visitation will work. Chico Basin has been one of the club's most popular field trip destinations for years. Hodges said Aiken has decided to limit group trips to 12 people, "and we will probably ask for reservations a month in advance in order to block them off."

That's because a new restriction imposed by the Colorado Land Board will limit visitation to only 20 birders a day. Birding, a popular draw under Ranchlands' open-arms management, will suffer severely under the new state-imposed model. For birding, the board defines "day" as only 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. — so no more afternoon or evening outings. And the board staff decided, without explanation, to confine birders to only three of the six birding hotspots on the property. The state's unilateral decision to close the ranch to birding starting next February also bans birders for most of the final lease year of the current, birding-friendly ranchers and their self-serve, anytime policy for birders.

Continued on page 15



Self-serve kiosk for birding at the ranch will disappear in 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sage Thrasher (left) and White-crowned Sparrow (right) on Chico Basin Ranch fences
Patrick O'Driscoll



CHICO BASIN *cont from page 14*

Because of the tight limit on daily birders, “We may also urge groups to schedule trips on weekdays,” Hodges said. “Much is still up in the air, including fees, though we’re looking at \$10-\$15 per person.” That’s in line with the current ranch operator’s daily fee of \$15 a person or \$10 each in groups of five or more. Aiken is also considering opening registration for individual birders seven days in advance.

She said Aiken and the Bird Conservancy “plan to have a conversation this winter” with the longtime Chico Basin tenant, [Ranchlands](#), “to discuss plans for 2024. As of now, Ranchlands doesn’t have a copy of Aiken’s lease, so they only vaguely know of our requirements.” Besides setting up a reservation system, Aiken must oversee birding visits, provide portable toilets, buy and carry insurance, and split proceeds 50-50 with the Bird Conservancy.

Ranchlands, a multi-state, multi-ranch cattle outfit owned by the **Duke Phillips** family, must leave Chico Basin before the end of 2024. Despite the Phillipses’ 24-plus years of profitable, nature-friendly and highly praised management of the ranch, the land board voted 4-1 in November to award the next agriculture lease to Flying Diamond, a multi-ranch company owned by the **Scott and Jean Johnson** family of Kit Carson, CO.

The Phillipses were stunned when, two months before the board was to vote, the board staff’s recommendation of Flying Diamond over Ranchlands was made public. When they appealed that finding, the board postponed its vote, originally set for October, until November. In addition to their appeal, the Phillipses filed a request under the Colorado Open Records Act for all internal and external communications around the recommendation. They had also sought copies of the scoresheets that land board staff used to evaluate the bids, on which the staff’s ranking of Flying Diamond first and Ranchlands second would have been based.

In early December, weeks after the board vote, Ranchlands had yet to receive any documents back from its open records request to the land board. It had, however, received copies of the board staff’s bid scoresheets — with all of the scores blacked out.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

In Focus: November field trippers!

Here's our fourth installment of **Field Trips in Focus**, with DFO field trippers out birding on November outings. Our goal remains to include in each month's newsletter at least one such photo from every DFO field trip the previous month. This month we have seven pictures from 22 field trips.

If you're on a DFO outing in December, take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best! It could be hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, scoping a distant bird, or just a candid moment. Have fun with it!

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs, if needed, to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com and CC: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month, no later than Sunday, Dec. 31. Again, photos of field trip *people*, not birds! Thanks!

NOVEMBER 4

Mountain Lakes and Scoters (Lake County)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Renee Casias, Darcy Juday,
Lorna Thomas, Archer Silverman,
Courtney Rella, Judy McKeon

Group setting up to scope on mountain
lakes field trip Nov. 4
(Renee Casias)



NOVEMBER 5

Aurora Reservoir

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Liza and Ajit Antony, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Cynthia Cestkowski, Ginny Gulakowski, John Batt,
Dallas Branum, Rosanne Juergens, Gigi Zarzuela

Nov. 5 field trippers prepare to scan Aurora Reservoir
Cynthia Cestkowski



Continued on page 17



NOVEMBER 10
**Chatfield SP in the
Afternoon/Evening**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Patricia Diluzio, Debra Strike,
Sharrie West, David Strike, Sharon Kelly,
Joel Jones, Anne Craig, Luke Jaramillo,
Julia Gwinn, Tedford Luck

DFO birders on an evening visit
to Chatfield SP on Nov. 10
(Anne Craig)

NOVEMBER 12
Denver City Park

Leader
Patrick O'Driscoll

Participants
Laurie Tripp, Archer Silverman

Archer explains what Laurie's viewing at
Duck Lake in Denver City Park trip Nov. 12
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



NOVEMBER 19
Boulder Reservoirs
(Baseline, Valmont, Boulder, etc.)

Leader
Laura Steadman

Participants
Joel Jones, Karen Clark, Meg Reck,
Benjamin Jacques, Susan Blansett,
Cheryl Ames, Debby Miller, Deb Piranian

All eyes on Dodd Reservoir during
Nov. 19 Boulder reservoirs field trip
(Debby Miller)



Continued on page 18

NOVEMBER 19
**Rocky Mountain Arsenal
NWR's Lake Ladora**

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Lynn Slaga, Patricia Diluzio, Adriana Jacobi,
Roxana Rogers De Sole, Maeve B,
Brady Anderson, Carly Crow

Chilly birding from Lake Ladora floating boardwalk
on Nov. 19 trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Jason Bidgood)



NOVEMBER 30

Littleton Area Lakes
(Jefferson, Arapahoe, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Patricia Diluzio, Nathan Crow, Leslie Dixon,
Edward "Buzz" Schaumborg, Rae Jones,
Laurie Tripp, Lynn Bakken

Scoping array at Ketring Park during Nov. 30
Littleton lakes field trip
(Laurie Tripp)



CONSERVATION

For the birds: Why every one of us should buy the Federal Duck Stamp each year

Matt Rodgers

Perhaps there is verity in poet-playwright **Oscar Wilde's** notion that man only kills that which he loves. If so, perhaps that was at least partly why hunters agreed to voluntarily tax themselves in the midst of the Great Depression to create what has become widely known as the [Federal Duck Stamp](#). I am also sure that the profligate abuses of wildlife over the previous century or so of western expansion put hunters and conservationists on high alert and more apt to act decisively when needed.

This decisiveness was needed maybe more than ever during the Dust Bowl era, when widespread and persistent drought coupled with the draining of vast wetlands to feed a hungry, growing nation led to startling declines in waterfowl population by the millions.

From around 1925 into the 1930s, the collective effort of conservation organizations and hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens led to the signing in 1934 by President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, more commonly known since as the Duck Stamp Act. The act essentially established a type of new hunting license for all waterfowl hunters aged 16 and over. What made it novel, though, was its balance of both form and function. It took the form of a postage stamp — and it directed 98% of all revenue from the waterfowl stamp sales to the acquisition and conservation of what are some of the most biodiverse and productive ecosystems on the planet: wetlands.

When the act was passed, the chief of the US Biological Survey (predecessor of today's US Fish & Wildlife Service), **Jay "Ding" Darling**, had been in his position just six days. But Darling's hands were literally all over the Duck Stamp idea from the beginning. He had already previously served on a special presidential committee for waterfowl conservation — he just happened to also be a fine artist, a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist who had lobbied assiduously for the stamp act.

After Darling hastily drew six "prototypes" for the new stamp/license, one was selected and the dye was cast on a funding mechanism perhaps better than any conservation program in the history of the US, if not the world.

The duck stamp originally cost \$1 (the equivalent of about \$22 today), which is close to the current \$25 price tag. Since its inception, it has generated more than \$1.1 billion for wetlands conservation. If you reflect that nearly half of all bird species on the continent as well as about half of all federally threatened and endangered species rely upon wetlands (whether as temporary stopovers or permanent homes), think about return on investment. Remember also that waterfowl were one of the very few bright spots in a dismal backdrop painted by the landmark [2019 article in the journal Science](#) on the loss of nearly 3 billion birds in North America since 1970. Resurgence of ducks and geese is undeniably linked to hunter-funded conservation through measures such as the Federal Duck Stamp, hunting license sales and private conservation groups like Ducks Unlimited.

In 1949, the Duck Stamp program evolved into a federally sanctioned art contest to design each year's new stamp that now draws entries from some of the nation's best wildlife artists. The [current duck stamp](#), which may be my favorite of all time, depicts **James Hautman's** painting of three Tundra Swans in flight. Some of my partiality to this species dates back 20 years to a waterfowl hunt near Melfort, Saskatchewan. While the hunt itself was memorable as thousands of Snow Geese put on an aerial ballet over the course of the morning, I vividly remember six or so Tundra Swans that landed within a stone's throw of our blinds. Even then, as a 20-something, I remember thinking I could never shoot at something so graceful. There was something different, even holier about the swans then, and my participation in the natural world was no more than that of an observer.

Among my other favorites is **Eddie Leroy's** 2020-21 stamp depiction of [Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks on the bayou](#) and

Continued on page 20

Joshua Spies' stunning 2009-10 stamp portrayal of a [big drake Long-tailed Duck in breeding plumage](#) (a sight that, by the way, I still have yet to see in the field). And the [1995-96 stamp](#) will always be special not because of the pair of mallards depicted but because it was the first year I was required to purchase a duck stamp to hunt.

I find there is some personal pride (and joy) in purchasing a duck stamp, apart from the numerous hunting licenses I've bought throughout my life. Interestingly, this pride has not waned even as my waterfowling has lessened over the past decade or so. I still find myself admiring the stamps as I now either place them on my binoculars or carry them in my wallet. I guess it reflects the satisfaction one gets from giving just a little back to a program that guarantees that 98 cents on the dollar goes to habitat work, regardless of whether it benefits a Red-shouldered Hawk in Louisiana, a freshwater mussel in Kentucky or a Northern Pintail in Washington.

There are about 45 million birders in the US, or about three times the number of current active hunters. In these times, there is also rapidly growing interest in animal welfare in both the natural world and agrarian settings. The time is ripe to leverage this growing interest to augment existing conservation initiatives like the Federal Duck Stamp and to create new funding sources and mechanisms.

The hunting and fishing communities have contributed robust funding to species management through excise taxes they pay on [hunting gear](#), [fishing gear](#) and related goods. Birders and other nature enthusiasts must follow suit and advocate to tax themselves similarly on binoculars, camping equipment, bird seed and other gear and goods.

In the meantime, please put your stamp on conservation as birders by purchasing Federal Duck Stamps (<https://www.fws.gov/service/buy-duck-stamp-or-e-stamp>) and supporting one of the most successful and aesthetically appealing conservation programs on the planet. I'll ask that we all support the [Colorado Waterfowl Stamp program](#), which gives all proceeds (\$10 or so per stamp) to wetlands projects located solely here in the Centennial State.

Even more importantly, please become a vocal advocate in the birding community for the creation of programs to increase funding for wildlife conservation. When you consider the sheer numerical advantage that birders have, even a 1% or 2% excise tax on birding equipment and goods would have profoundly positive effects on conservation of birds and habitat.

Matt Rodgers, DFO vice president and a club member since 2018, leads the environmental team at Buckley Space Force Base in Aurora. He enjoys anything to do with nature, from transforming his yard into a pollinator garden to training his yellow Lab, Bambi. He lives in Centennial with his wife and two children.



Image page 19:

The first Federal Duck Stamp, issued in 1934

Images page 20, top to bottom:

This year's stamp, Tundra Swans by Joseph Hautman
1979's Green-winged Teal stamp by Lawrence K. Michaelson
Only stamp of a hunting decoy, by James P. Fisher
Not all Duck Stamps feature ducks
First multicolored stamps appeared in the 1960s

All images by permission of US Fish & Wildlife Service

Welcome to new DFO members

Antoinette Burns, Colorado Springs; Michael Dougherty, Denver; Shelley and Charlie Wall, Littleton

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Ajit Antony and Liza Antony, Antoinette Burns, Doris Cruze, Christopher Curwen, Mackenzie Daley, Wes Donnell, Kristine Haglund, Sharon Kelly, Cynthia Kristensen and Jan Friedlander, Tedford Luck, Barbara Masoner, Victoria Miles, Patrick O'Driscoll, Barbara Retzlaff, Bob Righter, Christine (Charlotte) Ringleb, Niña Routh, Louise Schottstaedt, Mary Beth Searles, Denise and Danny Smith, Holly Sollod and John Chanin, Nancy and Bob Stocker, Debra Strike

Friends of DFO

Kathy Barnum, Bayard and John Cobb, Mackenzie Daley, Julia Gwinn, Felice Lyons, Patrick O'Driscoll, Linda Purcell and Billy A Harris Jr., Barbara Retzlaff, Bob Righter, Christine (Charlotte) Ringleb, Becky Russell, Debra Strike, Sue Summers, Robyn and Jeremy Winick

DFO Hawk Watch

Kathy Barnum, Ann Bonnell and Mary Ann Bonnell, Susan Bowles, Mackenzie Daley, Kathy Holland ("In Memory of Don & Charity Stone"), Sharon Kelly, Senja and Mark Meiklejohn, Patrick O'Driscoll, Bob Righter, Christine (Charlotte) Ringleb, Serge and Valentina Roumi, Debra Strike, Shelley and Charlie Wall



CONSERVATION

Update: Last call to join Denver CBC on Dec. 16

Joey Kellner

Now that it's December, the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is only days away. This year's count, the 69th in Denver and sponsored by National Audubon, is scheduled for **Saturday, Dec. 16.**

Everyone is encouraged to participate, from beginning birders to experts, and all others in between. As count compiler/coordinator **Joey Kellner** notes every year, "Fees: None! So, no excuses! Come have a great time and help count birds!"

The Denver CBC is conducted inside a 15-mile diameter circle over most of southwest metro Denver. Besides suburban hotspots and JeffCo foothills communities, it also includes Chatfield SP and several major reservoirs. The CBC divides it into 23 count zones where assigned teams canvass their areas for species and numbers.

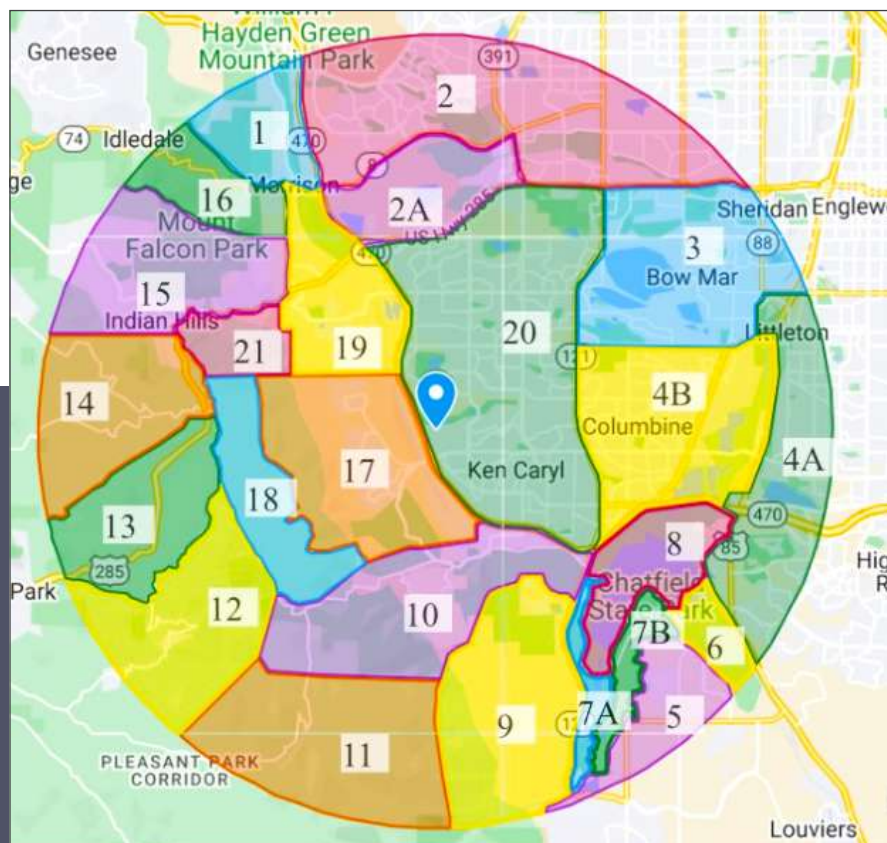
Depending on area, the suburban Denver count may run just half a day or until day's end. But participants are free to come for an hour, a morning or all day.

This year's post-count meetup is set for 5 p.m. MST in the Chatfield SP headquarters, which is on the south-central side of Chatfield Reservoir near the park's Heronry Overlook. Access is via the park entrance off South Wadsworth Boulevard. State parks vehicle entry pass is required, and carpooling is encouraged.

To sign up for a count, see the map of numbered count areas. Then go to the list, find the one that matches the numbered area you want to join, and contact that leader. Kellner can also assign you to a less-in-demand area that may need additional observers if you contact him at swdenverbirding@gmail.com or 303-978-1748.

Continued on page 22

Area	Location name	Area leader	Contact info
1	Red Rocks Park	Gregg Goodrich	303-655-9135
2	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573
2A	Bear Creek Lake Park	Cyndy Johnson	303-378-1335
3	Bow Mar/Marston	Art Hudak	720-671-3331
4A	Lower South Platte/East	Ed Holub	303-979-2194
4B	Lower South Platte/West	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671
5	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833
6	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596
7A	Middle South Platte/West	Sue Summers	253-678-3721
7B	Middle South Platte/East	Steve Stachowiak	720-256-6583
8	Chatfield Reservoir	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748
9	Upper South Platte**	Jill Holden	720-288-4018
10	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Barbra Sobhani	303-905-4718
11	Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169
12	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534
13	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759
14	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321
15	Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217
16	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	lauramsteadman@gmail.com
17	Ken Caryl Ranch	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com
18	Garrison Gate	Ryan Dibala	860-455-3224
19	Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508
20	Willow Creek	Dale Pate	575-706-4584
21	Mt.Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645



*** Upper South Platte team closed to new registrants on Nov. 22*

Area numbers on CBC map correspond to list of leaders and contact info

Joey Kellner, a four-decade member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the Denver Christmas Bird Count, club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor.



▲ **Hooded Merganser**

This female Hooded Merganser was swimming with her mate in a cove at South Platte Park in Littleton on Nov. 17 when, after a couple of unsuccessful dives, she came up with this good-sized crawdad for dinner.

— **Paul Malinowski**

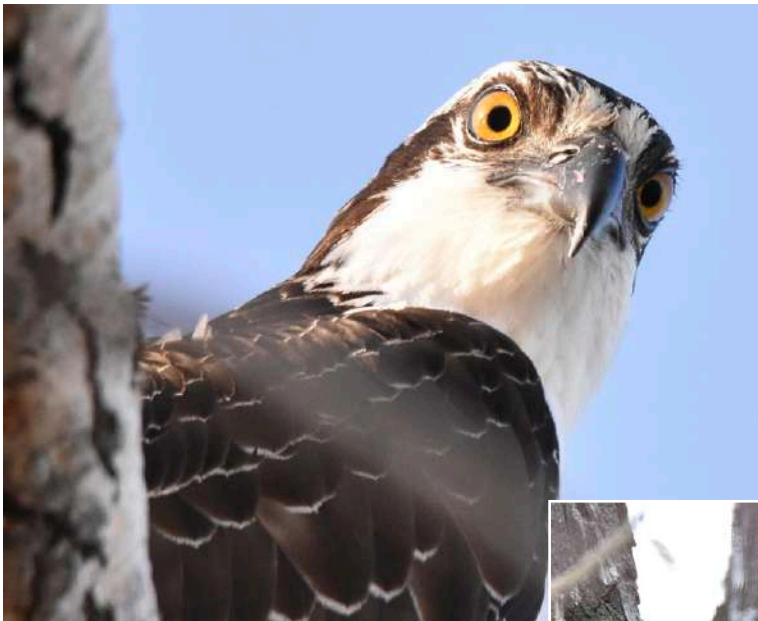
LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

DFO members, Facebook friends share favorite bird images

In November, *The Lark Bunting* asked DFO photographers and followers of DFO's Facebook Group page to send us their favorite, best or most memorable bird photos of 2023 for this year-ending *Last Word, Last Look*.

Sixteen of them delivered an eclectic variety of pictures, from the year's Colorado first-record rarity of a Limpkin at an out-of-the-way Plains wildlife area to a handsome Mountain Bluebird in one photographer's own backyard.

Thank you to them for their fine glimpses of some of the birds we all love. We celebrate the thousands that we saw, photographed, checklisted and admired through the year with this holiday gallery of those that touched some of us the most. Enjoy this look back as we all look forward to more great avian encounters in 2024.



◀ Osprey

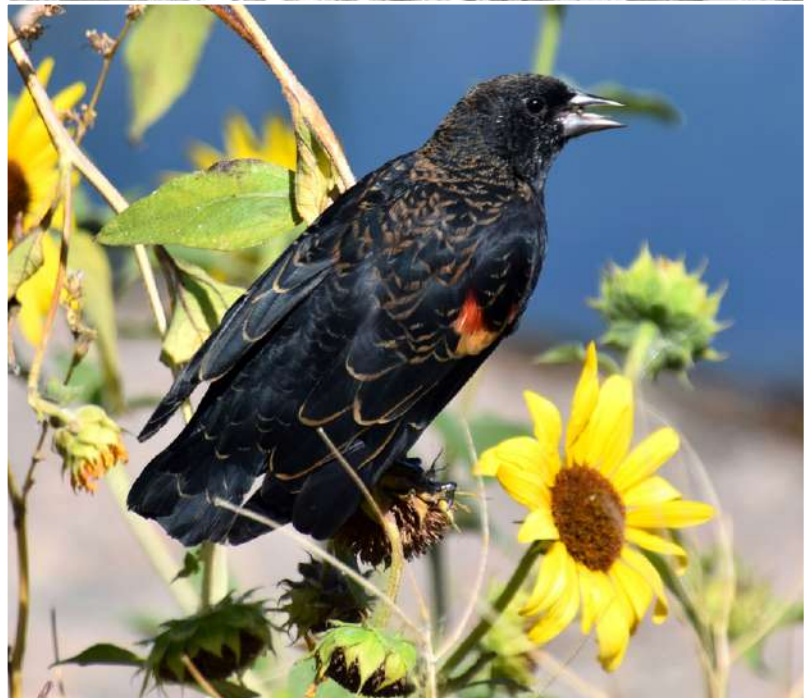
Visiting Harriman Lake in Littleton around sunset on Nov. 19, I saw this Osprey scan the surroundings before resuming its search for fish from a bare-tree perch at the water's edge.

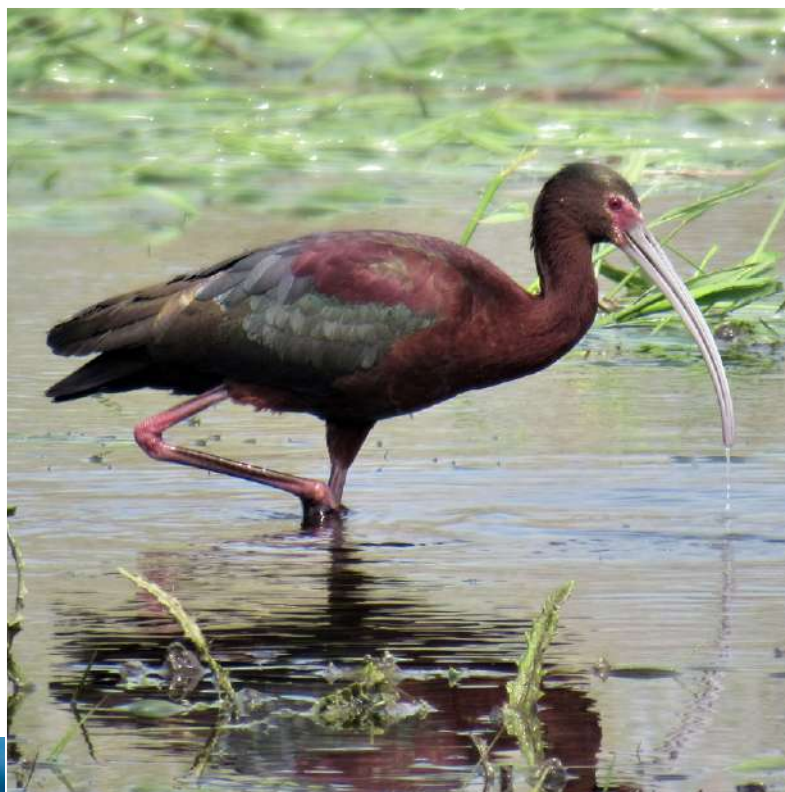
— *Rimley Bauer*

Great Horned Owls / Red-winged Blackbird ▶

We saw many wonderful birds this year. One of Gary's favorites is this Great Horned Owl family (top right), photographed May 5 in a tree at Fly'n B Park in Highlands Ranch. It was so fun seeing the owlets with Mom, very curious and watching us watching them. In late August, Ginny spotted a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds (bottom right) feasting on sunflower seeds at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and captured a shot of this one.

— *Ginny and Gary Gulakowski*





◀ White-faced Ibis

After all the rain we had in the spring, the Great Lawn Park in Denver's Lowry neighborhood was flooded. When I entered the park on May 20, there must have been 15 White-faced Ibis in one area. It was the first time I'd ever seen one! What a great moment with these beautiful birds.

— *Lenore Bender*

▼ Horned Grebe

I saw this Horned Grebe on April 10 as it fished in Lake Ladora at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. I spent quite a long time that day with a couple of these birds, enjoying the light of the setting sun on them. I got lucky with this image.

— *Cedric Pereira*





▲ Wood Duck

My visit to Sterne Park in Littleton on Oct. 25 was only my second time photographing birds. Having seen several species hopping out of the pond to check out a crabapple tree, I sat quietly nearby. After about an hour, this curious immature Wood Duck waddled over to the tree. His struggles to get fallen crabapples into his mouth, bobbling and flipping them up, missing more than he swallowed, grabbed my heartstrings. Every time I look at this, I smile at the memory.

— *Pamela Croydon*

◀ Black-chinned Hummingbird

Visiting the Denver Botanic Gardens' Chatfield Farms on July 23, I watched as this little female Black-chinned Hummingbird buzzed around the garden. Luckily for me, when she finally sat still, I was ready for the photo.

— *Dana Rae Vaughn*



▲ Limpkin

In early July, I was able to see this state rarity at Ramah State Wildlife Area not long before it left after hundreds of people had traveled out onto the Plains to see and photograph it.

—*Scott Hammel*

◀ Eared Grebes

I was on a field trip July 23 at Walden Reservoir during the Colorado Field Ornithologists convention. Our leader, **Chip Clouse**, knew where to find Eared Grebes close by for good shots. As this mother carried the two babies on her back, their father dove for fish to feed to the chicks.

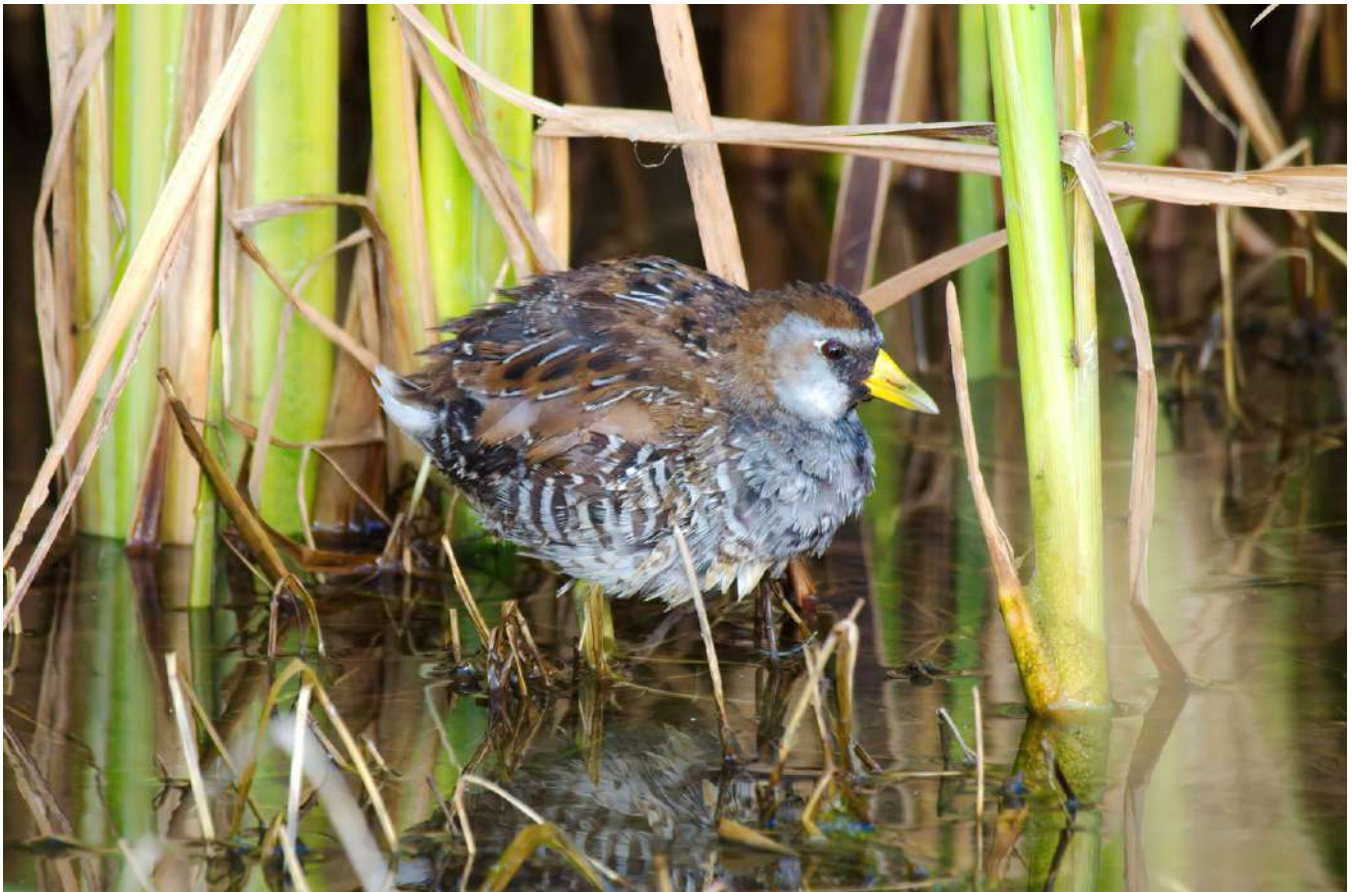
—*Sibylle Hechtel*



▲ **Mountain Bluebird**

This male was one of the pair of Mountain Bluebirds that used the nest box at my house this year. I took this picture of him in the dawn hours of April 3. The photo was later featured on the eBird home page for a week or so.

— *Krista Hinman*



Sora/Virginia Rail

After years of adding Sora (above) and Virginia Rail (left) to my eBird checklists only because I could hear them, I finally saw both species one day in mid-August. While in Cherry Creek SP near the Cottonwood Wetlands, I heard the rail nearby. After a bit of hesitation, it walked right across the path. I held my breath as I took the shot! Then, walking around the flooded area of the park, I spotted a Sora very close to the path, and several more farther out. The bird's coloration astounded me, especially its yellow bill. What a fortuitous day for birding!

— **Rosanne Juergens**



▲ Barn Owl

A family of Barn Owls had a burrow in the steep clay banks of Coal Creek in Erie. One June evening, we watched patiently after sunset for them to make an appearance. Although the five nestlings wouldn't come out until the dimness near dusk, the mother emerged first to go hunting in just enough light for this shot.

—*John M. Salisbury*



Snowy Egret

This one was fishing in Big Dry Creek
near City Park, Westminster.

— *Ed Neville*



Sandhill Cranes

These five Sandhill Cranes were taking off at dawn on Oct. 26 to begin foraging at Monta Vista NWR, their fall migration rest stop.

— *Theresa Braymer*



Bohemian Waxwing

On Jan. 13, just two days home from a month abroad, I saw scattered reports of Bohemian Waxwings. But when a friend said he'd seen 42 in one Littleton flock, I immediately headed out. After a fruitless search, I had just put away my camera when I heard the trilled Bohemian call overhead. I chased the small flock a distant sidewalk view, mostly obscured behind a house. When a woman came out to ask what I was photographing, I explained the rarity. "Oh, we have them all the time," she said, but when I showed her how it differed from the Cedar Waxwings she usually saw, she invited me, a total stranger, in for a better look. As she, her husband and son-in-law watched, I took at least 100 backyard shots from close in. They thanked me for teaching them about a new species, but I was the more thankful one. A week later, the really big flocks arrived, but I'll always remember my first photo-op of Colorado's Bohemian Waxwing winter irruption of 2023.

— **Rob Raker**

A Greater Prairie Chicken is captured in mid-flight, its wings fully extended. The bird's plumage is a mix of brown, black, and white, with a distinctive orange patch on its neck. It is standing on one leg in a field of dry, brown grass. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape of similar vegetation.

Greater Prairie Chicken

I took this shot from the Wray, CO Chamber of Commerce's viewing blind early on the morning of April 1. It was one of my favorite photos of the year and a memorable experience.

— Jason Bidgood

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY HOLIDAY BIRDING!



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 02-03 | FEBRUARY-MARCH 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

HAWK WATCH

Already? DFO spring raptor count coming

PAGE 10

BIRD ESSAY

Why species will be getting new names

PAGE 16

CHICO BASIN RANCH

So long: it's last call for unfettered birding

PAGE 28

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

DFOer's road ramble thru Argentina, in pictures

PAGE 32



Photos top to bottom:
Song Sparrow, Cherry Creek SP
Dark-eyed Junco, Denver front yard
White-crowned Sparrow, Roxborough SP
Jim Esten



Jim Esten, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, took pictures on and

off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He didn't focus on birds until 10 years ago while visiting his sister in Florida. He is retired from network IT service.

ON THE COVER

A vertical triptych for cold winter: three familiar seasonal sparrows

Patrick O'Driscoll

As *The Lark Bunting* prepares for its annual midwinter break, we're shaking up our usual look with three cover birds instead of just one. Our New Year's gift to you is a trio of cold-tolerant sparrows seen regularly right now around Denver and the Front Range. We hope you'll enjoy these extra cover images (all captured by **Jim Esten**, our photo editor) until the newsletter returns in March.

The bird at the top is familiar in any season: Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*). When sparrows are generally scarce in winter's chill, a few Songs are likely to be hiding in thickets of reeds beside frozen ponds, lakes or streams, or even out foraging on open ground. One of our most widespread songbirds, the Song Sparrow has an astounding 24 to 38 different subspecies; they vary widely not only in the shade and tone of their plumage but also size (some subspecies are 1.5 times larger than others).

The bird at the bottom is another we find more often than just winter. The White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) is actually a year-round resident of Colorado's high country and Western Slope, but many occur across the eastern one-third of Colorado in non-breeding seasons. They sometimes flock in winter with other sparrows, from Song and American Tree to lingering rarities like Harris's or White-throated, and even the occasional Lincoln's, Swamp or Golden-crowned Sparrow.

Our cover wouldn't say "midwinter" without the bird nicknamed "snowbird," our truest winter sparrow of the bunch. The Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) in the middle of our cover is of the Oregon race, one of five kinds that occur in Colorado. After spring and summer breeding up the Pacific Northwest coast and beyond, Orecons come back to Colorado, the interior West and western Great Plains for winter. Of the others, one variety, the Gray-headed, lives in Colorado year-round.

"Snowbird" is an apt nickname. When the mercury drops and, especially, when snow flies, up to two dozen of these ground feeders flock to my backyard to gobble the birdseed I toss out for them daily. All the while, the opening lines of [*Snowbird*](#), **Anne Murray's** No. 1 pop-country hit of half a century ago, resound in the mind's ear:

*Beneath this snowy mantle cold and clean
The unborn grass lies waiting
For its coat to turn to green
The snowbird sings the song he always sings
And speaks to me of flowers
That will bloom again in spring*

Welcome back, snowbirds . . . and good winter birding, everyone!

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



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Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

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The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

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- Available *only* to DFO members
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Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

A New Year's resolution for *your* birds: replant a more bird-friendly yard

Sharon Tinianow

New Year's resolutions are traditional at this time of year. Typically, these center on health or financial issues. For DFO members, I can think of a few that deal with birding: expanding your life list . . . joining more DFO field trips . . . trying out new places to bird.

But what about a resolution that benefits the wider world? Granted, it's more challenging. Your own actions are the only ones you have direct power to control. But what if we really *could* do something, on our own, that can immediately benefit the larger world, particularly the larger realm of birdlife?

Here's one: If you have outdoor space at home, commit to a more bird-friendly landscape. Wildlife ecologist **Doug Tallamy**, author of several books and a [great biodiversity website](#), suggests that if 50% of US land in private hands were planted with native plants, it would restore the biodiversity of our continent. Given that 83% of the land in America is in private ownership, he may be right. Tallamy calls this ideal a "homegrown national park," one we can create now, in 2024, if we choose.

A number of DFO volunteers have already taken steps in this direction. In 2021, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting* and a field trip leader, replaced half the turf grass in front of his east-central Denver duplex with native plants. He'd been imagining what his neighborhood off East Colfax Avenue looked like 150 years ago, when bison still grazed along the Front Range. He researched plants to choose and created a rough plan. Then he hired helpers to remove the old sod, amend the soil, put in the plants and add pea gravel mulch. Two years later he has a patch of blooms and grasses that attract bees, butterflies and a variety of birds, from goldfinches to hummingbirds. Pat enjoyed the process and the result so much, he intends to tackle his backyard in 2024.

Pat recommends the [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland as a great source of native plants and inspiration. In fact, DFO's Feb. 26 program, *Gardening on the Wild Side*,

features center founder and director **Jim Tolstrup** as the presenter. His book *Suburbitat: A Guide to Restoring Nature Where We Live, Work, and Play*, details the center's efforts to bring native landscapes into everyday neighborhoods. Register for [Gardening on the Wild Side](#) today and join us for inspiration and concrete ideas about how to begin.

DFO vice president **Matt Rodgers** is systematically transforming his larger yard in Centennial for birds, too. His advice: create a whole-property plan that considers exposure to sunlight, the land's grade and slope, and how water flows across it. Then divide the yard into manageable projects you can tackle one at a time. Hold off on choosing plants until you know which microclimates exist around your house.

Planning, prepping and planting is an opportunity to be creative. The payoff is seeing pollinators visit the native plant blooms, and flocks of goldfinch, juncos, chickadees, and towhees feasting on native seeds throughout the seasons. Matt suggests plants and the resources from [High Country Gardens](#), the mail-order gardening company.

DFO Board member **Tina Jones** lives on an acre of land near Denver's Fort Logan National Cemetery. With deep knowledge of native-plant botany, she has transformed her acre into a haven for nesting birds and hummingbirds. If you seek to attract specific birds, she recommends common sense knowledge of habitat and elevation. Rufous and Calliope hummingbirds, for instance, migrate no lower than Evergreen or Golden, so don't expect to draw them to a yard down on the floor of the Great Plains.

Tina recommends visiting the [Colorado State University Extension website](#). She also suggests you consider having your soil tested. CSU offers many resources for gardeners, including [Plant Select](#) varieties that do well along the Front Range. To learn the plants, Tina says resources and classes are available through [Denver Botanic Gardens](#), the [Colorado Native Plant Society](#), and [Front Range Wild Ones](#).

Continued on page 6

Another resource is [Audubon Rockies](#)' 10th annual, day-long workshop, [Ways to Make & Keep a Garden for the Birds & Bees](#), scheduled for Feb. 3 via Zoom (or in person in Cheyenne, WY). Audubon Rockies also manages the [Habitat Hero](#) birdscaping program, and its website offers resources specific to our area.

To purchase native plants in person next spring, also consider visiting [Harlequin Gardens](#) in Boulder. Additional mail-order sources include [Prairie Moon Nursery](#) and [Prairie Nursery](#). Plans also are underway for a DFO tour of private native-landscape yards in the Denver area this summer. Stay tuned here for more information.

It is a radical act to buck the trend of turf, tar and trees that defines so many of our public and private spaces. But maybe this is the year to get radical about supporting the birds we enjoy by creating habitat vital to their survival.

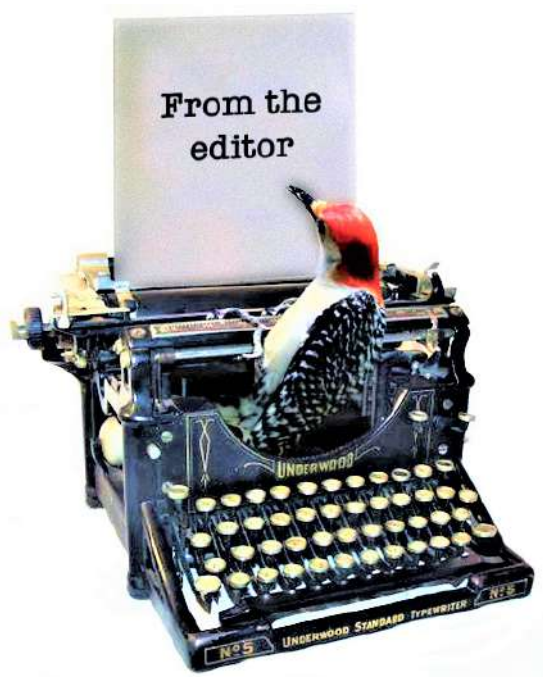
Happy New Year!

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



Rufous Hummingbird at Showy Milkweed
Tom Koerne / US Fish & Wildlife Service



So long until March — but while we're away . . .

If it's January-February, it's time for *The Lark Bunting's* semi-annual hiatus.

This month and next, and again in July-August, our newsletter team takes a month off. We use it to refresh, restore, and re-load for another half-year of delivering news, photos, features and useful information to you, the Denver Field Ornithologists family.

This year, we're also using the hiatus for something else: Brainstorming a new format and role for *The Lark Bunting* itself. In the coming months, we aim to reimagine and redesign DFO's newsletter into a 21st-century re-embodiment of what is now a prior-century monthly. Even though this newsletter has been digital and online for years, today's *Lark Bunting* remains the very model of a mid-to-late-20th century, printed-on-paper magazine. In the 2020s, it's a structure and formula about as dated as that classic manual Underwood typewriter at the left.

In a word, we're overdue. This year marks the 60th year of DFO's newsletter. First published in late 1965, it had quite a title: *MONTHLY REPORT OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS of the Denver Field Ornithologists*. About six years later, someone (we're not sure who, but thank you) renamed it *The Lark Bunting* — after Colorado's state bird, of course.

In the five decades since then, the newsletter broadened, matured, was redesigned several times, and finally went digital. But that evolution always remained within the size, shape and look of something members once held in their hands: A printed, magazine-sized sheaf of paper pages, folded in fours, a vestige of the more than 500-year history of the printing press.

At the end of 2022, we printed and mailed the last few black-and-white paper copies of this newsletter to a dwindled handful of print subscribers. But our old-fashioned format persists. Some would say, "And why not?" Imaginatively fashioned (by our peerless design-layout artist **Jennie Dillon**) with a subtle palette and gorgeous color folios of birds, *The Lark Bunting* is still lovely to look at.. But is it still a *newsletter*? Immediate? Relevant? As timely as . . . a text, a social media ping, an email?

We aim to consider and reconsider all that — and fashion a new alternative. Numerous other organizations, both public and private, deliver their newsletters as emails chock full of clickable links, smart headlines and blurbs, and some of the same quality photography. But their readers don't have to scroll through the digital pages of a print-like PDF document to find what interests them.

So DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee will have that model in mind as we re-envision a better-organized, more user-friendly newsletter that's easier to read (and produce) and puts what you need and want right at your fingertips.

Stay tuned for updates as we work in 2024 toward a newsier, more immediate monthly dispatch with all of your needs in mind. And if you have ideas about that, drop me a note at patodrisk@gmail.com. **We want to hear from you.**

And enjoy your mid-winter birding. We'll be back in March.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

GULLS, GULLS, GULLS! NEW BIRD BOMBS DROP ON JAN. 11, FEB. 15

The first BIRD BOMBS bird ID mini-webinar of 2024 is set for **Thursday, Jan. 11 at 7 p.m. via Zoom**. [I Wish They All Could Be California Gulls](#) (click title for registration link) will help you identify and enjoy the wide variety of Colorado's winter gulls, with a focus on eight core species here this season.

Also upcoming: A February mini-webinar on Colorado bird taxonomy (generally stated, the physical, genetic and behavioral characteristics of a species). [BIRD BOMBS: Colorado Bird Taxonomy Made Simple](#) is set for **Thursday, Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. via Zoom**. (Click program title for registration link)

You can also check out the video of the previous gull ID session at [BIRD BOMBS: Get Gullable](#) to learn key basics of Colorado gull identification. As always, videos of all 23 episodes (and the January session on California Gulls if you miss the live webinar) are in [DFO's BIRD BOMBS video archive](#).



REGISTRATION ENDS JAN. 15 FOR DFO SEQUEL TRIP TO AZ SKY ISLANDS

A 12-day DFO field trip to the bird-rich southeastern Arizona “sky islands” habitats is planned for May 15-26 in the footsteps of an identical and successful trip last spring. Registration opened Dec. 15 for a random selection draw on Jan. 15 to choose seven birders to accompany veteran trip leader **Joey Kellner**, who planned and led the previous trip. Visiting one of the continent’s premier birding destinations, the all-inclusive trip will cost \$2,600 (rental vehicles, lodging, gas and food, leader’s expenses and land/access fees). Unspent funds at trip’s end will be refunded to participants who must first sign up via the usual DFO field trip registration process on the club website. Questions? Contact Kellner at vireol@comcast.net. An itinerary with locations and species targets is at https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/Documents/AZ_Trip_Details.pdf

DENVER'S BLUFF LAKE PLANS 2024 SUMMER CAMP FOR AGES 5-17

Early registration began Jan. 1, 2024 for [summer day camp at Bluff Lake Nature Center](#), the popular in-town Denver birding hotspot on the east edge of the Central Park neighborhood. The 10 weeks of themed, weekday summer camps will run between June 3 and Aug. 18, with separate sessions for ages 5-6, 7-12 and a “junior counselor” section for ages 13-17. Due to the camp’s popularity, this year families will be limited to pre-registering for one session per child so that more kids get a chance to attend camp (Bluff Lake will maintain waitlists). General registration is open until May 20. The program’s goal is for one-quarter of the campers to receive full needs-based scholarships to attend.



A new session theme this year is “Future Scientist,” for kids who are jazzed about the idea of growing up to be a geologist, biologist or physicist. Some of the daily 9 a.m.-3 p.m. sessions include the option of three hours of pre- and post-camp day care. [Click on this link for registration](#), camp costs and other details. The camp director is DFO Hawk Watch volunteer **Ben Jacques**, an experienced wildlife educator.

Continued on page 9

FEDS WANT TO SHOOT 500K BARRED OWLS IN PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The Barred Owl, which has aggressively expanded its range into the territory of the endangered Northern Spotted Owl, is the subject of a remarkable federal proposal. The US Fish & Wildlife Service wants to recruit hunters to kill more than half a million Barred Owls in the region over the next three decades. Larger and more aggressive, the species disrupts spotted owl nests, outcompetes for food, and sometimes even kills or interbreeds with them. Spotted owls already have been in decline because of habitat loss. But the invasion of their cousins from the East is an existential threat.

“This is about conserving two species,” Fish & Wildlife’s supervisor in Oregon told Oregon Public Broadcasting. (E)ven if the service was able to remove that number of barred owls over the next 30 years, that would represent less than 1% of the global population of barred owls.” Actually, Fish & Wildlife has culled Barred Owls before on a smaller scale in California, Oregon and Washington since 2013. Now it’s asking for public feedback on its management strategy. For more on the proposal, read this [article in the Seattle Times](#).



“COLOR OF THE YEAR” STARTED WITH . . . BIRDS?!

Why does global commercial color influencer [Pantone](#) have a color of the year? It may have sprung from . . . birds. Specifically, a 19th-century ornithologist whose passionate pursuit to describe the innumerable colors of birds may have inspired mid-20th century printers and advertisers to standardize, catalogue and describe the shades, hues, tints and pigments in every aspect of commercial life. That’s *National Geographic*’s take, anyway. In an [article about color](#), it recounts how Smithsonian artist and ornithologist **Robert Ridgway** was assigned to describe America’s abundant birdlife. Doing that meant capturing in words and color swatches each bird’s plumage hues, “from the vibrant reddish orange of an American Robin’s breast to the wine reds of the Purple Finch.” He eventually published bestsellers on the subject: *A Nomenclature of Colors for Naturalists* and *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*.

This year’s color of the year, BTW, is not birdy — it’s “[Peach Fuzz](#),” a shade Pantone says can help us all “find peace from within, impacting our well-being. An idea as much as a feeling, Peach Fuzz awakens our senses to the comforting presence of tactility and cocooned warmth.” OK, maybe — but to this eye, Peach Fuzz kind of reminds me of the comforting presence and cocooned warmth of the Say’s Phoebe, our kinda-sorta peach-breasted flycatcher. Or maybe, in the right light, some flamingos. I wonder what Ridgway would say?



HAWK WATCH

Hawk Watch 2024: Who's ready to help DFO count spring raptors on Dinosaur Ridge?

Janet Peters

In case you've missed it, the Front Range has seen a seasonal increase in the population of birds of prey this winter. Barr Lake SP and Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR are great locations to spot Ferruginous Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks (including handsome examples of the [Harlan's subspecies](#)), Bald Eagles, and Rough-legged Hawks.

But before long many of these will be migrating north to their breeding grounds as our summer raptor visitors, including Swainson's Hawks, arrive or pass through. Did you know that Colorado's population of Bald Eagles will then drop to barely 10% of its winter population?

Don't miss the chance to witness our spring migration of hawks, eagles and other birds of prey. Joining in Denver Field Ornithologists' 2024 Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch between March 1 and May 10 is a great way to do so. While enjoying the seasonal movement of these magnificent birds, you can increase your raptor identification skills and participate in DFO's largest community science project.

The data we gather from the count is fundamental for raptor conservation. Observers from the Dinosaur Ridge counting station in Jefferson County have compiled more than 30 years of data in one of the continent's few spring migration monitoring sites. Our Hawk Watch volunteers track 17 species of eagles, hawks, falcons and vultures.

Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge engages experienced counters and weekend observers to ID species and record migration data. But it also relies heavily on volunteers to assist in spotting birds and engage with members of the public who visit the site. Prospective and returning volunteers and anyone interested in sharpening raptor identification skills are encouraged to participate in the following programs:

- **Informational Hawk Watch Zoom Webinar with Raptor Identification**

On Wednesday, Feb. 21 (7-8:30 p.m. MST), Hawk Watch trainer and former DFO president **Dave Hill** will lead a Zoom webinar, *Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge: Community Science at Work*, on beginning raptor ID skills and details about volunteering for this annual project. Register in advance at [DFO Programs and Events](#) on the DFO website

- **Volunteer Field Orientation**

On Saturday, Feb. 24 (10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. MST), join experienced hawk watchers at the Dinosaur Ridge viewing platform for on-site orientation. Register in advance at [Hawk Watch Volunteer Resources](#) on the DFO website

Prospective volunteers can also visit [DFO Hawk Watch](#) for more information. To join the Hawk Watch Volunteer e-mail list and express your interest in volunteering, contact [Janet Peters](#), Hawk Watch Committee chair and volunteer coordinator.

Your eyes, after Hawk Watch training and orientation, help improve our data in this annual raptor count. And we are counting on you to help make 2024 another successful season.

Janet Peters, a DFO member since 2021, is chair of the Hawk Watch Committee. She has also supported Hawk Watch as a volunteer observer, coordinator and fundraiser. She took up birding about five years ago after an engineering career in the energy field.



Longtime volunteer Gary Rossmiller on
Dinosaur Ridge north of Red Rocks
Janet Peters



Tami Bulow

SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow

Monday, January 22, 2024

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

A birding adventure to deep South Texas can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding trips in the continental US. Owing to its famous, border-defining river, the Lower Rio Grande Valley actually lies farther south than one-third of Mexico. That offers the opportunity to find vagrant bird rarities from Mexico on a regular basis, as well as the more than 500 species of birds that migrate seasonally through the area or call it home.

Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-2007) calls it home, too. Before moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to manage the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, she worked as manager of conferences, conventions and tours for Colorado-based [American Birding Association](#). Now retired, Bulow lives in the border city of Harlingen, TX but continues to dabble in birding work.

In her evening Zoom presentation on Jan. 22, “Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More,” Bulow says she will reveal “five places that are a must visit” for birders, “and another 30 or 40 that won’t disappoint.” She also says there are “15-20 specialties that you must come to the Rio Grande Valley for,” including Great Kiskadee and Green Jay, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Altamira Oriole, Groove-billed Ani and Green Kingfisher.

Bulow has more advice: “Spring migration is best, but a mild winter can’t be beat for delightful birding. Top tip: Avoid summer. You will thank me later.”

Although she was born in Boston, Bulow’s family moved around — Connecticut, Denver, Richmond, Atlanta. “Twelve

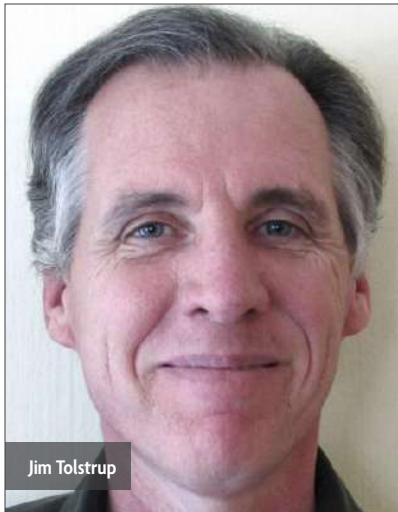
schools in 12 years,” she says. “Mom was a backyard birder, so I grew up filling feeders and calling out birds that were feeding there. When I got my first house, the first thing I did was hang a bird feeder, and then chuckled to myself, ‘I must be a birder!’ ”

She returned to Colorado as a student at the University of Denver and worked after graduation at local ice arenas, managing the DU Arena and its youth sports program. Later, her travel as a sales rep for skate maker Riedell Skates “fed my birding addiction.”

Still later, a transfer to Albuquerque led her to start “Thursday Birders” there — like Denver’s own Tuesday Birders weekly meetup. She would become president of Central New Mexico Audubon Society and VP of the state Audubon organization. She says that prepared her to be DFO president after she moved back to Denver.

Left jobless after years with ABA, she applied to be director of South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center in Texas and landed the job. During her years in south Texas, she also managed nature tourism for Chambers County east of Houston and as executive director of the Texas Tropical Trail region for the Texas Historical Commission.

Today she writes grants for Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival (Port Canaveral, FL), “But basically I am retired,” she says, though she does “some bird guiding” at local festivals and privately, and volunteers for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. A Texas Master Naturalist, she is working on learning the butterflies and plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Gardening on the Wild Side

Jim Tolstrup

Monday, February 26, 2024

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Join award-winning Colorado landscape designer/horticulturist **Jim Tolstrup**, director of the [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland, for a backyard garden-inspiring presentation focused on the relationship between native plants and wildlife. Tolstrup founded the center 20 years ago to promote wildlife-friendly landscape design and maintenance practices. The 275-acre center describes itself as “a unique model for preserving native biodiversity on the midst of development.”

Located in the heart of the Centerra planned community between Boyd Lake SP and the Interstate 25 corridor, the center is tucked between two habitat-rich reservoirs on the northeast side of Loveland in Larimer County. It contains a native-plant demonstration garden, heritage orchard, community veggie garden, workshops, educational programs, and greenhouses where it grows thousands of native plant seedlings for sale and distribution across northern Colorado and the Front Range. Centerra’s developers call the center their “nature spirit guide.” They boast that the community has been certified by the National Wildlife Federation as Colorado’s only Community Wildlife Habitat.

Tolstrup is author of [Suburbitat: A Guide to Restoring Nature Where We Live, Work, and Play](#), a book about the center’s efforts to bring native landscapes into everyday neighborhoods. He previously served as land steward of Shambhala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes, CO. He also ran his own landscape design business in Kennebunkport, ME, where he installed gardens at the “Summer White House” of **George** and **Barbara Bush**.

Tolstrup holds a certificate in gardening arts from the Landscape Institute of Harvard University and the Arnold Arboretum and has received awards for landscape design from Plant Select®, American Society of Landscape Architects, Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, and Denver Water. He teaches widely throughout Colorado, has written numerous articles on gardening and environmental stewardship.

To view more about the center and its work in advance of Tolstrup’s presentation, visit High Plains Environmental Center’s [YouTube page](#), which has a dozen videos, including [this explainer on Tolstrup’s “Suburbitat” concept](#).





FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Without our record-setting 2023 trip leaders, DFO outings simply wouldn't be

David Suddjian

DFO's Field Trips program is life-changing. Consider the pleasure, thrills and beauty you experience in birding. Recognize the deep joy in sharing and learning with like-minded friends who also love being out in nature and birding. And appreciate a great team of field trip leaders, abundant trip opportunities and a fascinating array of birders, from newbies to veterans, who come together to enjoy lots of birds, many lifers, fun with new friends, and so many adventures.

Denver Field Ornithologists had a BIG year in 2023! No, we didn't *do* a "Big Year," but our field trip program had its strongest year ever. The most obvious superlative is the sheer number and scale of our trips, probably unique in the birding world. In 2023, we had **291 field trips** in a single year. Statistically, that's an average of more than 5-1/2 trips per week.

More than 525 individual birders participated (often multiple times) on those 291 free, public birding outings. We checklisted a record 384 species of birds (310 in Colorado) in a single year, and submitted about 1,600 eBird checklists with our results.

None of this would have happened without our DFO field trip leaders, all volunteers. Thirty-eight of them led field trips in 2023. I am thrilled that 14 new trip leaders participated in our training and certification process. Ten of them led their first trips in 2023. New trip leaders led four outings in December alone. I tip my cap to new leader **Gigi Zarzuela**, who in her first year led an amazing 11 field trips in 2023!

All that would be hard to top, but look for more exciting results from our growing Field Trips team in 2024.

In tribute to these hardworking volunteers, I invited some of the participants in their trips to offer shout-outs to our leaders and the program. Here is some of what they said:

I have traveled to so many new places, and I've learned so much more about birding with the help and expertise of the DFO leaders. Perhaps most important is the association and friendships developed while on the DFO field trips

— **Luke**

The value of expert guidance is immeasurable. I saw birds I could never find on my own, and I got to know other birders, too. I made fabulous memories

— **Ann**

DFO field trips have been an incredible boost into the birding world. The superb leaders are patient, generously sharing their knowledge

— **Joan**

"Passionate" is the best word I can find to describe DFO leaders. It's contagious and uplifting every time I go out

— **Winston**

DFO field trips provide an outlet to explore places with a fresh eye, ask questions that are never too silly, and connect with fellow bird nerds, many of whom I'll never forget

— **Michelle**

I really like DFO trips because of both the leaders and the fellow participants. The leaders (and many participants, too) love to share their knowledge — which is extensive — and to help people of different birding levels

— **Deb**

I like the chance to wander slowly with a knowledgeable leader and other good spotters, without rushing the process of "checking off" birds

— **Laurie**

Joining DFO was the best thing I did to continue learning about birds

— **Melody**

Thank you to our excellent troupe of experienced leaders, and especially to the younger people who are stepping up to lead the next generation of birders

— **Dana**

Oh, the places you can go on a trip with DFO!

— **Judy**

Continued on page 14



New leader Ajit Antony guiding his first DFO trip Dec 10
Jason Bidgood



New trip leader Courtney Rella, left, helping with a bird ID
David Suddjian



Sunrise birding Nov. 18 on Staunton SP field trip
David Suddjian

FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 13*

Finally, two more thank-yous by name to all our trip leaders who led outings in 2023 and those who joined the field trips team. As I noted before, we'd be nowhere without you:

10 OR MORE FIELD TRIPS

Jason Bidgood, Anne Craig, Joey Kellner, Diane Roberts, David Suddjian, Gary Witt, Gigi Zarzuela

5 TO 9 FIELD TRIPS

Nate Bond, Karen Drozda, Benjamin Jacques, Laura Steadman, Donna Stumpp

3 TO 4 FIELD TRIPS

Chris Blakeslee, Susan Blansett, John Breitsch, Charlie Chase, Jared Del Rosso, Jessica Miller, Patrick O'Driscoll, Bailey Parkhouse, Dale Pate, Peter Ruprecht, Bea Weaver

1 TO 2 FIELD TRIPS

Ajit Antony, Liza Antony, Carly Crow, Mary Geder, David Hill, Chuck Hundertmark, Clark Jones, Tally Kerr, Mary Keithler, Norm Lewis, Kip Miller, Megan Miller, Courtney Rella, Buzz Schaumberg, Paul Slingsby, Doug Ward

NEW TO THE DFO FIELD TRIPS TEAM

Ajit Antony, Liza Antony, Helen Butts, Wes Donnell, Clark Jones, Anna Joy Lehmiche, Tally Kerr, Jessica Miller, Kip Miller, Bailey Parkhouse, Courtney Rella, Denise Reznicek, Doug Ward, Gigi Zarzuela

David Suddjian, Field Trip chair since 2021, came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Since 2016, he has led several hundred DFO outings. He organized the club's 2018 "Big Year" and created DFO's popular "Bird Bombs" webinar series on bird ID

IN MEMORIAM

Ann Bonnell (1938-2023): Tuesday Birder, conservation activist, DFO honoree

Patrick O'Driscoll

Another tireless birding volunteer and passionate activist in metro Denver's conservation community has left us. **Ann Bonnell**, who led and popularized the decades-old "Tuesday Birders" weekly outings, died the day after Christmas 2023.

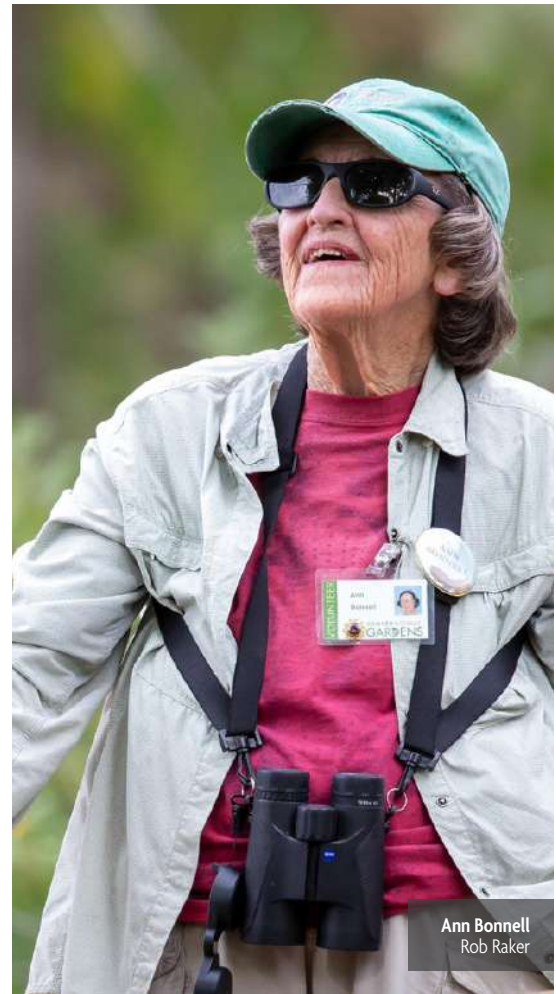
A DFO member for decades and recipient in 2009 of the Ptarmigan Award, our club's highest honor for volunteerism, Bonnell was 85. She passed less than a month before her 86th birthday (Jan. 18). Ann had been a resident of MorningStar at Applewood, an assisted living and memory care residence in Lakewood. Her daughter, **Mary Ann Bonnell**, and Tuesday Birders co-leader **Cynthia Madsen** were there "when she peacefully left us," Madsen said.

Bonnell's family plans to host a "celebration of life," which Ann and her daughter had already mapped out together. After she moved into assisted-living in January of 2022, members of Tuesday Birders donated a park bench in Bear Creek Lake Park to honor Bonnell's contributions to their informal birding meet-up group.

During more than 40 years in the Denver area, Bonnell was a schoolteacher, trainer, volunteer and member of numerous conservation groups (DFO, Colorado Field Ornithologists, Denver Audubon, PLAN Jeffco, Sierra Club). In 25 years as Tuesday Birders coordinator, Ann led about 50 bird walks a year. She also educated countless people about birds and environment issues through her work at Roxborough SP, South Platte Park, Denver Botanic Gardens and the years-long "Save Chatfield" campaign that tried to block habitat destruction by a reservoir expansion project. In 2019, CFO presented her its Lifetime Achievement Award.

Because she passed within days of the end-of-December deadline for this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, we plan a more complete remembrance of Bonnell in the next newsletter. In the meantime, to read a tribute at PLAN Jeffco, the nonprofit open-space conservation group where Ann volunteered for more than 25 years, [click here](#).

Her survivors include daughter Mary Ann and son **John Bonnell**, his wife **Sarah Benson**, and their sons **Max** and **Jacob**; and nephew **William Krummes**, his wife **Brigitte**, and their daughter **Lucia**. In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory can be made to [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#), [Denver Audubon](#), or [Denver Field Ornithologists](#).



Why dozens of North American bird species are getting new names: Every name tells a story

*Editor's note: This essay by DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** was first published by [The Conversation](#), an independent, nonprofit collective that edits and posts explanatory writings of academic experts on events, discoveries and issues that matter. It appeared on Dec. 7, 2023 and is republished here with permission. Visit [The Conversation](#) for the [complete posting with illustrations and related content](#).*

Jared Del Rosso

This winter, tens of thousands of birders will survey winter bird populations for the National Audubon Society's [Christmas Bird Count](#), part of an international bird census, powered by volunteers, that has taken place every year since 1900.

For many birders, participating in the count is a much-anticipated annual tradition. Tallying birds and compiling results with others connects birders to local, regional and even national birding communities. Comparing this year's results with previous tallies links birders to past generations. And [scientists use the data](#) to assess whether bird populations are thriving or declining.

But a change is coming. On Nov. 1, 2023, the American Ornithological Society announced that it will [rename 152 bird species](#) that have names honoring historical figures.

Soon, Christmas bird counters will no longer find Cooper's Hawks hunting songbirds. They won't scan marshes for Wilson's Snipes. And here in Colorado's Front Range, where I'll participate in a local count, we'll no longer encounter one of my favorite winter visitors, Townsend's Solitaires.

New names will take the place of these eponymous ones. With those new names will come new ways of understanding these birds and their histories.

Names matter

In my time birding over the past decade, learning birds' names helped me recognize the species I encounter every day, as well as the ones that migrate past me. So I understand that it may not be easy to persuade people to accept new names for so many familiar North American species.

This naming had consequences. Generations of [poets](#) and naturalists, like [John Muir](#) and [Mabel Osgood](#)



Eastern Whip-poor-will
Louis Agassiz Fuertes

Continued on page 17

Wright, associated the species with whippings. Their writings often tell us as much about 19th and early-20th century Americans' views of morality and punishment as they do about this remarkable bird.

What's wrong with eponymous names

The whip-poor-will's name translates the species' song, leaving room for interpretation. Eponymous names based on a specific person, like Audubon's Oriole or Townsend's Solitaire, are less descriptive. Even so, these names [shape how people relate to birds](#) and the history of ornithology.

Many of these names honor people, usually white men, who engaged in racist acts. For example, **John James Audubon** [owned slaves](#), and **John Kirk Townsend** [robbed skulls from Native American graves](#). Changing these names helps separate birds from this harmful, exclusionary history.

But for multiple reasons, the American Ornithological Society is [changing all eponymous names](#), not just those linked to problematic historical figures. First, the organization decided that it did not want to make judgments about which historical figures were honor-worthy. Second, it recognized that all eponymous names imply human ownership over birds. Third, it acknowledged that eponymous names do not describe the birds they name.

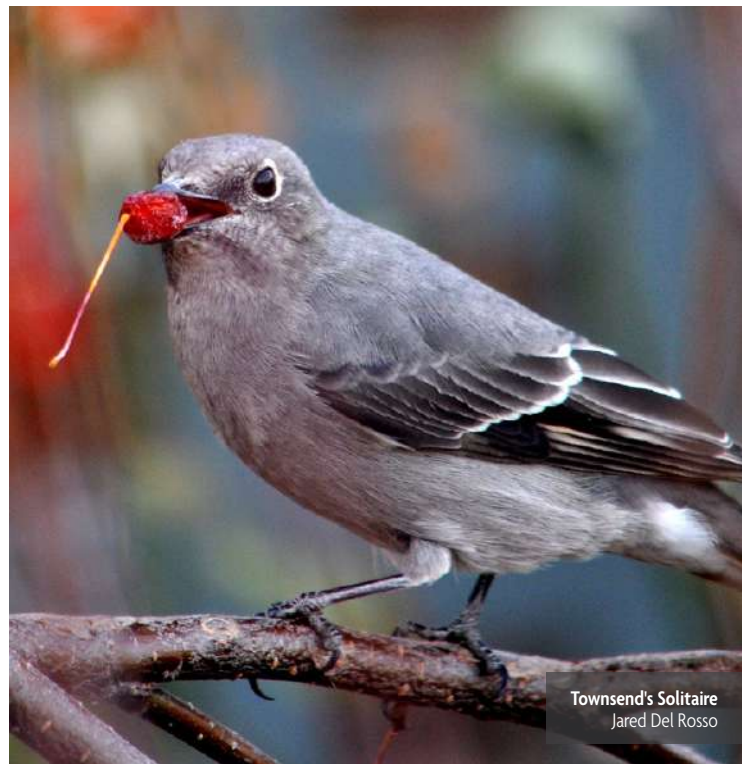
Change as a constant

While birders certainly will have learning to do once these changes become official, change is a constant in how people relate to birds.

Consider the technologies birders use. In the early 20th century, binoculars became more affordable and readily available. As Texas A&M historian **Thomas Dunlap** [has shown](#), this helps explain why birders now "collect" birds by spotting them, rather than by shooting them, as Audubon and others of his time did.

But as a [scholar of politics, culture and denial](#), I also know that language shapes our understanding of history and violence. This includes bird names, as I've learned through my ongoing research into one [iconic species' place in American culture](#): the Eastern Whip-poor-will.

Eastern Whip-poor-wills are nocturnal birds who nest in forests of the eastern US and Canada. English colonialists named the species for their [distinct, repetitive call](#), which sounds like a malicious command to inflict punishment: "Whip poor Will, whip poor Will, whip poor Will."



Townsend's Solitaire
Jared Del Rosso



Wilson's Snipe
Bettina Arrigoni via Wikipedia

Continued on page 18

Field guides, too, have come a long way. Early guides often relied on dense written descriptions. Today, birders carry compact, smartly illustrated guides, or we use smartphones to check digital guides, share sightings and [identify birds from audio recordings](#).

Names, too, have long been open to revision. When the American Ornithological Union, the predecessor of today's American Ornithological Society, created an [official list of bird names](#) in 1886, it erased untold numbers of Indigenous names, as well as local folk names.

Since then, some names have come into use and others have fallen out of fashion, especially as ornithologists lump and split species. Consider the ongoing adventure of just one species: Wilson's Snipe, a round marsh bird whose name will be among those changed.

In the American Ornithological Union's original checklist of North American birds, Wilson's Snipes were a distinct species from the Common Snipes of Europe and Asia. Then, in the mid-1940s, the Union decided the two were one, and Wilson's Snipes became Common Snipes. In 2000, the Common Snipe was split back into two species, and Wilson's Snipes again became Wilson's Snipes.

Either way, many early accounts of the North American species simply call these birds "snipes." This is the name **Alexander Wilson**, for whom the bird is named, himself used in [his account of them](#).

Names reflect new knowledge and values

Science has greatly expanded human understanding of birds in recent decades. We now recognize that birds are [intelligent](#), with rich [emotional lives](#). Radar, lightweight transmitters and satellite telemetry have helped scientists map the [transcontinental migrations](#) that many bird species make each year.

Trading eponymous names, which treat birds as passive objects, for richer descriptive names reflects this sea change in our understanding of avian lives.

Our thinking about race and racism has evolved dramatically as well. For instance, we no longer use folk names for birds based on [racial and ethnic slurs](#), as Americans of the 19th and early 20th centuries did. The decision to change eponymous bird names reflects this shift.

It also reflects broader efforts to reckon with the legacies of racism and colonialism in our relationships with the natural world. There is increasing recognition that legacies of racism shape our natural landscapes. Just as public monuments can have "[expiration dates](#)," so can names for species, [geographic features](#) and places that no longer reflect contemporary values.

Birders no longer live in Audubon's world. We rarely consult his heavy, multi-volume folios. We celebrate that we list birds that we have seen in the wild and left unharmed, rather than collect their bodies as specimens.

Soon, we'll also stop using some of the names that this world gave to birds.

Jared Del Rosso, a birder since 2012, is a sociologist who dabbles in nature writing. Besides The Lark Bunting, he contributes to the Center for Humans and Nature's [Stories & Ideas](#) section and blogs about birds at [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Wilson's Warbler
Jim Esten



Steller's Jay
Patrick O'Driscoll

Welcome to new DFO members

Pete and Ann Christensen, Denver; Marcelo and Lisa Forte, Highlands Ranch; Brian Huculak and Paula Rosson, Arvada; Luke Jaramillo, Littleton; Eric Perryman and Lori Potter, Boulder; Mark Sather, Denver; Lynn and Kevin Schutz, Monument; Beverly and Fred Trail, Henderson; and Peggy Wait and Lowell Baumunk, Littleton

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Helen Berkman; Mary Beverly; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Jill Boice; Pete and Ann Christensen; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Jeff Dawson; Mary and Dave Driscoll; Laurie Duke; Deborah Hebblewhite; Sharon Hines; Doug Hodous; Roy Hohn; Edie Israel; Darcy Juday; Debra Lentz; Robert and Wendy Miles; Barbara Retzlaff; Kris Saucke; Mary and Charlie Saunders; Lori Sharp; Mary Ann Tavery; Michelle Trotter; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele, and Scott Yarberry

Friends of DFO

Janice Arey; Mary Beverly; Andrea Cahoon; Dale Campau; Pete and Ann Christensen; Martha Eubanks; Elizabeth Fischer; Newell Grant; Sonja and Grace Hahn; Ashton and Dana Hiatt; Roy Hohn; Kathy Holland; Darcy Juday; Meg and David Kenny; Robert and Wendy Miles; Barbara Retzlaff; Mary and Charlie Saunders, and Jan Justice Waddington

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Kathleen Bahr; Mary Beverly; Carol Cwiklinski; David Hill; Roy Hohn; Diane Hutton; Cynthia Madsen; Robert and Wendy Miles; Mary and Charlie Saunders; Janet Shin; Mary Ann Tavery; Laurie Tripp; Debra Lentz, and Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

In Focus: Sweet 17 of December's trips!

Wow, what a way to end the 2024 DFO birding year: "Birders birding" photos from SEVENTEEN of the 21 field trips we sponsored during December. This is our latest (and largest) installment of **Field Trips in Focus**, where we mark DFO trips with pix of what the birds see: US birding.

Let's keep it going! If you're on a DFO outing in January and February, take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best. It could be hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, scoping a distant bird, or just a candid moment. Have fun with it! We'll run them in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out in early March.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com and cc: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month, no later than **Sunday, Jan. 31** or **Thursday, Feb. 29**. Again, photos of field trip *people*, not *birds*. Thanks!

DECEMBER 4

South Platte Park + Chatfield SP (Arapahoe and Douglas COs)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Scott Somershoe

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Patricia Diluzio, Anne Craig,
Linda Purcell, Dave Prentice, Julia Gwinn,
Bonnie Prado, Luke Jaramillo, Ginny Gulakowski,
Roxana Rogers De Sole

Field trippers scan Chatfield Reservoir on Dec. 4 trip
(Anne Craig)



DECEMBER 5

Aurora Reservoir + Cherry Creek SP (Arapahoe)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Cynthia Cestkowski,
Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg, Luke Jaramillo,
Patricia Diluzio, Jill Perry, Peggy Gonder

Aurora Reservoir crowd on DFO field trip Dec. 5
(Bonnie Prado)

Continued on page 21



DECEMBER 6
**South Platte River Trail @
E. 88th and I-76 (Adams)**

Leader

Liza Antony with David Suddjian

Participants

Ajit Antony, Luke Jaramillo, Patricia Diluzio,
Rae Jones, Marie Mager, Morgan Kahle, Greg Smith

**All eyes on a Merlin bathing in the
South Platte River on Dec. 6 field trip**
(David Suddjian)

DECEMBER 9
**Prewitt + Jackson Reservoirs
(Morgan and Washington)**

Leader

Ben Jacques

Participants

Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg, Michelle Trotter,
Luke Jaramillo, Timothy Condon,
Kristin and Brad Tallis, Carly Crow

**Huddled against cold, field trippers watch an eagle
hunting a goose on icy Jackson Lake on Dec. 9**
(Michelle Trotter)



DECEMBER 10
**Denver Airport "Raptor
Alley" (Denver/Adams)**

Leader

Ajit Antony with Jason Bidgood

Participants

Patricia Diluzio, Sofia Prado-Irwin,
Deb Piranian, Winston Liu,
Mary Fran O'Connor, Laurie Tripp

**First-time trip leader Ajit Antony draws a bead
Dec. 10 on a bird of prey in Denver raptor loop**
(Jason Bidgood)

Continued on page 22

DECEMBER 10
Waterton Canyon (Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Mary Ramsey, Melissa Wetzig,
Ginny Gulakowski, Lynn Slaga,
Roy Catalano, Brent Gordon, Chloe Smith

Watching a Golden Eagle soar above
Waterton Canyon on DFO trip Dec. 10
(David Suddjian)



DECEMBER 12
Grand County

Leader
Chris Blakeslee

Participants
Linda Purcell, Donna Stumpp,
Karen Clark, Mary Geder, Edie Israel

Participants birded across Grand County
on Dec. 12, ending in Grand Lake's Point Park
(Mary Geder)

Continued on page 23

DECEMBER 17
**Bluff Lake Nature Center
(Denver)**

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Rebecca Heath, Lisa and Marcelo Forte,
Patricia Diluzio, Deb Piranian,
Amy Manning, Debby Miller

Patricia Diluzio and Deb Piranian
seek elusive Golden-crowned Sparrow
on Dec. 17 trip to Bluff Lake
(Jason Bidgood)



DECEMBER 17
**Pueblo (Lake Pueblo SP,
Valco Ponds, et al.)**

Leader
Jessica Miller

Participants
David Suddjian, Anne Craig,
Debra and David Strike, Melissa Wetzig,
Winston Liu, Jenya Fox,
Megan Miller, Dave Prentice,
Ian de la Rosa

Scoping Pueblo Reservoir for
Pomarine Jaeger on joint DFO-
Aiken Audubon field trip Dec. 17
(Megan Miller)



DECEMBER 20
**Southwest Metro Area
(Jefferson)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Judy McKeon, Michael Yuan,
Adelia Honeywood, Mark Bennett,
Rae Jones, Archer Silverman, Patricia Diluzio,
Zach, Luke and Sara Jaramillo

Scoping Chatfield Reservoir on Dec. 20 trip
through SW metro area
(David Suddjian)



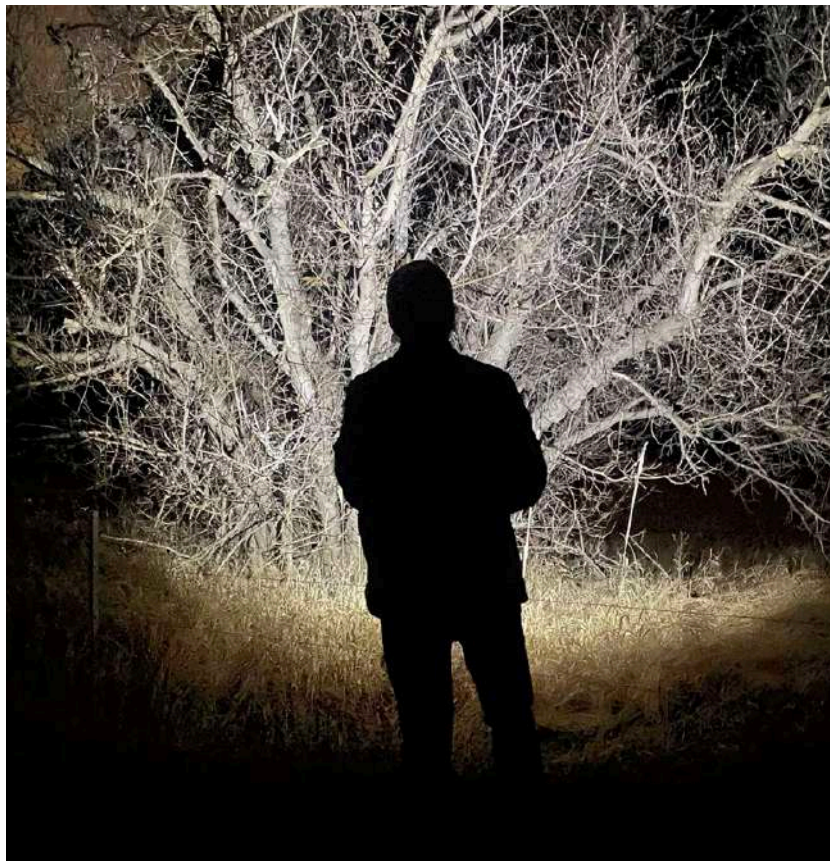
DECEMBER 22
**Clear Spring Ranch
Open Space (El Paso)**

Leader
Megan Miller

Participants
Courtney Rella, Angela Trnka,
Michelle Trotter, Sarah Leavesley,
Archer Silverman

Field trippers focus on White-crowned Sparrow
flock on Dec. 22 outing to Clear Spring Open Space
in El Paso County
(Michelle Trotter)

Continued on page 25



DECEMBER 23

Ken Caryl Valley Area (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Michelle Trotter, Gigi Zarzuela, Dallas Branum,
Nadiyah Watts, Michelle Puplava, Scott Levine

Spotlighting Northern Saw-whet Owls
on a pre-dawn DFO trip Dec. 23 in
Ken Caryl Valley area
(Gigi Zarzuela)

DECEMBER 24 Stearns Lake + Coal Creek (Broomfield + Boulder)

Leader

Courtney Rella with David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Lynn Slaga, Linda Purcell,
Elizabeth Fischer, Adelia Honeywood,
Lori Potter, Eric Perryman

Christmas Eve birders check American Tree Sparrows
on Stearns Lake field trip
(Anne Craig)



Continued on page 26

DECEMBER 27

Littleton (Arapahoe)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Marie Mager, Julia Gwinn, Andrea Duran,
Donna Feldman, Bonnie Prado,
Diane Highbaugh, Greg Smith,
Joon Huhn, Linda Purcell

Focusing on a Golden Eagle along
South Platte River during Dec. 27 field trip
(David Suddjian)



DECEMBER 29

Cherry Creek SP (Arapahoe)

Leader

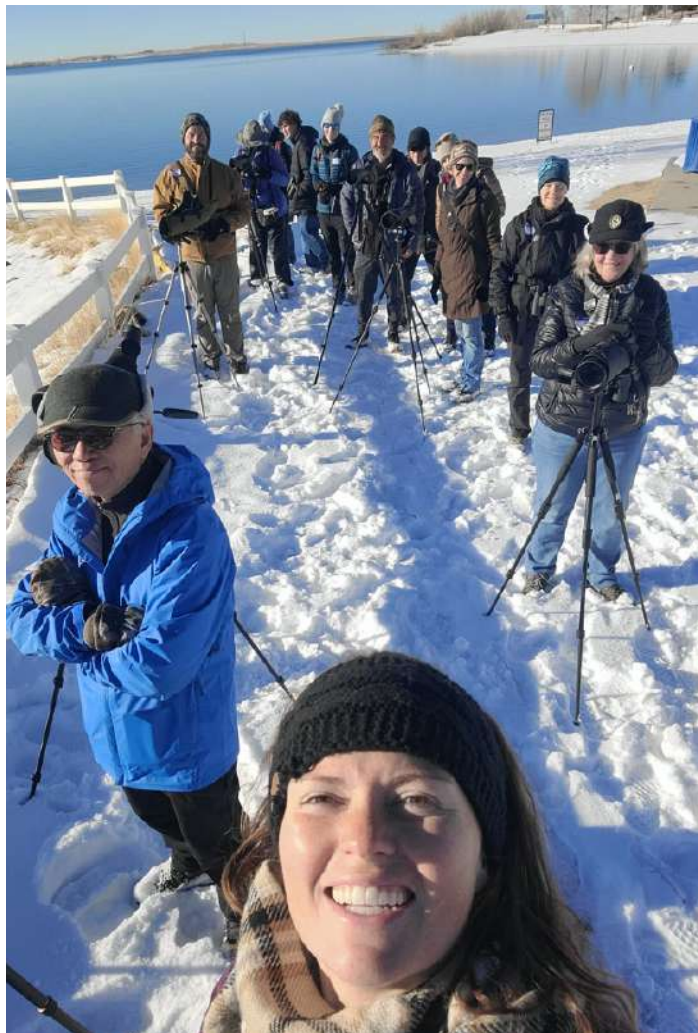
Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg
with David Suddjian

Participants

Meg Reck, Mark Gawn,
Dave Prentice, Holly Sollod,
John Chanin, Winston Liu,
Donna Feldman, Kathleen Bahr,
Amy and Shmuel Korengut

Loon-spotting from shore at
Cherry Creek SP on Dec. 29
DFO outing
(Dave Prentice)

Continued on page 27



DECEMBER 30
Aurora Reservoir (Arapahoe)

Leader

Carly Crow with David Suddjian

Participants

Jennifer Randall, Angela Trnka,
Anne Craig, Patricia Diluzio, Susan Shamos,
Timothy Condon, Lisa Forte, Marcelo Forte,
Ann Christensen, Isaac Ho, Kris Saucke

Group selfie at Aurora Reservoir on Dec. 30 trip
(Carly Crow)

DECEMBER 31
**South Platte Park
(Arapahoe)**

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Cynthia Breidenbach,
Sofia Prado-Irwin, Patricia Diluzio,
Judith Cohen, Patricia Kuzma Sell,
Amy Manning, Kyle Sandersen,
Michael Charney, Gigi Zarzuela,
Holly Sollod, John Chanin, Alison Kondler,
Brent Gordon, Melody Serra

New Year's Eve birders mark DFO's
record 291st trip of 2023 in South Platte Park
(Patricia Diluzio)





CONSERVATION

Birding's final winter at Chico Basin Ranch: So long to that anytime access we loved

Patrick O'Driscoll

Over the past two decades, Colorado birders have filed nearly 11,000 eBird checklists from Chico Basin Ranch and its eBird hotspots.

It comes as a cold slap, then, to see each of those eight hotspot listings online now labeled with a parenthetical red-flag warning: **(CLOSED TO PUBLIC BEGINNING 1 MARCH 2024)**

That's true, though not entirely accurate. After Feb. 29, anytime, drop-in birding at one of Colorado's richest birdlife habitats will cease. After that, the state-owned ranch on the shortgrass prairie of El Paso and Pueblo counties southeast of Colorado Springs will be open to birders only 10 tightly restricted weeks a year. In spring and again in fall, narrow five-week windows during seasonal migration will be limited

to just 20 people a day, by pre-registration only, and only six hours from morning to midday each day.

So if you still want to show up whenever and register at the ranch's rustic, self-serve kiosk for a day of unscheduled, unsupervised birding, you're on the clock: only seven weeks remain, give or take a day — weather permitting, of course.

Winter isn't the best time to bird what may be Colorado's greatest known bird migration waystation. But in any season, Chico Basin has its charms. Year-round species like Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Curve-billed Thrasher mini-migrate in winter out to the ranch's brushy expanses of cholla cactus. Other ranch regulars, hardy holdovers and winter birds of prey (Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Merlin) are around. If there are open pools in iced-over ranch ponds and lakes, waterfowl are possible.

"It's *really* quiet in winter," says longtime Chico Basin birder **John Drummond**. "You can be there on your own and never see *anybody*."

But unless the Colorado State Land Board changes its mind someday, no one will ever bird there again in winter — let alone early spring, mid-summer or late fall either. Whatever the season, Chico Basin was a good reason . . . to go birding. But not for long.

Losing migration "shoulder" seasons

"We lose those shoulder months. We lose April, the first week of June, late August, and the three weeks in October when migration is still going on," laments Drummond, a Colorado Springs resident who calls the land board's birding policy "a really strange thing . . . What was so great was the freedom to cover it all," the run of the entire ranch. "There were no restrictions. Gates? If the gate is open, leave it open. If not, leave it as you find it."

Then, in 2023, the land board retooled its leasing scheme. With the current 25-year umbrella lease on the ranch due to expire at year's end, the board has split off non-agricultural uses like birding, fishing, hunting and guest-ranch services from the cattle operation. The thin excuse for drastically narrowing birder access from 52 weeks to 10? The potential "conflict" of roaming birdwatchers getting in the way of ranch work and livestock. The present birding-friendly leaseholder, the **Duke Phillips** family, says no such run-ins have ever occurred.

Continued on page 29



2nd Acadian Flycatcher in state, May 2023 in ranch's Bell Grove, soon to be off-limits
Bill Maynard



Ladder-backed Woodpecker, year-round resident of the ranch
Bill Maynard

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 28*

"The Phillipses, they worked with us," Drummond adds. "They never complained about harassing cattle or affecting their operation, because we didn't."

But even if the family had won the bidding for the new 10-year, agriculture-only lease (it did not), the land board's takeover of all other uses would have blocked them or anyone else from continuing to invite birders in anytime, as the Phillipses still do now.

It was the family, in fact, that first invited birders to Chico Basin, while negotiating to lease the 87,000-acre spread in 1999-2000. One of the very first was **Tony Leukering**, then a bird bander for the Colorado Bird Observatory (now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies). "I was invited in" by the Phillipses "to provide data and information on bird occurrence," says Leukering, an ornithologist and eBird reviewer now living in Dodge City, KS.

So many birds

What he found astonished him. "We conducted general bird surveys during the following winter and spring," Leukering says. He placed featherlight nets to capture and band birds near the grove where the conservancy's long-running banding station now stands. "On May 19, 2001, we erected just six mist nets in the early morning, but captured in excess of 100 individual birds, including, if memory serves, 75 Swainson's Thrushes." About the same time, Colorado Field Ornithologists got permission to lead a single field trip during its 2001 convention in Pueblo.

"I've never seen so many migrant land birds on the ground in the western US, before or since," Leukering marvels. "Additionally, 20-plus species of warblers were detected that morning, including Golden-winged, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Palm, Mourning, and Hooded."

"That single morning," he adds, "created the legend of Chico Basin Ranch."

The Phillipses would soon welcome birders and the banding station, and the legend grew. Today the ranch's list of recorded birds exceeds 350 species. Over the years, more birders learned of Chico. DFO began leading field trips there, which became so popular they sometimes filled up within minutes of posting.

"I've got fantastic memories of that place," says DFO member **Mark Amershek**. "That used to be a trip that **Paul Slingsby** (another longtime leader) ran for years. I inherited it." Amershek remembers taking a large group out to see Sprague's Pipits in a remote part of the ranch that will soon be permanently off-limits. "It was phenomenal. For 90 percent of the attendees, this was a lifer bird. I'll miss that."

Continued on page 30



60 birders pursued rare Nelson's and Leconte's sparrows at Chico Basin in October 2012
Bill Maynard



DFO field trippers seeking pipits at Chico in 2015
Mark Amershek

Continued on page 31

Losing bird hotspots

Closed, too, will be three less-visited but important eBird hotspots: close-in Bell Grove (where Colorado's second-ever Acadian Flycatcher was recorded last May) and Twin Ponds and May Ranch, two farther-afield spots more popular with ranch regulars.

Bill Maynard of Colorado Springs, another birder from the earliest days, also roamed the Chico outlands for ground-nesting Short-eared Owls, pipits, longspurs and Mountain Plovers, among many others. He counts himself “extremely unhappy” with the land board’s moves. “I stopped going to Chico this past summer.”

Maynard said Leukering knew from the start that “Chico was the place, and he got permission” for birding from the Phillips family. “After the first year, (Tony) invited me and **Mark Peterson** and maybe **Brandon Percival** out. If the Phillipses knew that birders weren’t going to steal stuff and leave (pasture) gates open, they might let us out there.” Thus began the ranch’s birding program.

Maynard went on to create Chico Basin’s first printed checklist for birders, and he “used to write little two-paragraph articles on the ranch’s website” about birds and birding. “They let me go anywhere I wanted to.”

Aiken Audubon, National Audubon’s chapter in Colorado Springs, holds a “no-fee” lease to oversee birding and register visitors once the spring and fall migration birding periods open in late April and again in late August. (Those five-week slots will coincide with the banding station’s periods of operation.) Given the 20-birder daily limit, Aiken will try to schedule multi-birder group visits on weekdays to ease maxing out on weekends.

No room for every birder

Drummond foresees bumpy going and bruised feelings. “During hot birding weekends, you might easily get 20 birders, unless there’s a super rarity and then everybody will be upset because the first-comers will get there and then no more,” he predicts. “And last year, Chico Basin got put on the map by an American Birding Association website. A lot of out-of-state people were coming in, more than ever. ABA may have to put up a notice about the new restrictions.”

No one knows yet whether, on March 1, an actual physical gate will go up at the ranch’s iconic, wide-open north entrance — or if “NO TRESPASSING” or “NO BIRDING” signs will be posted to ward off the uninformed.

With 10 months left on their lease, it’s unlikely the Phillipses will physically bar entry. The land board already blindsided them when it arbitrarily chose to begin the new restrictions on birding and other non-ag uses as of March 1 instead of Dec. 31, 2024, when their lease formally expires.



Lapland Longspur in livestock water tank
location to be off-limits
Bill Maynard



Anna Joy Lehmicke with Northern
Saw-whet Owl at banding station
Bill Maynard



Rustic check-in kiosk for
birders at Chico Basin Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll



Tony Leukering showing hummingbird
to children at banding station in 2006
Bill Maynard

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Drive. Stop. Bird. Repeat: Denver birders motor 2,000 miles through Argentine spring

Photos by Mark Amershek

Below: Some of the thousands of flamingos at Laguna
Mar Chiquita inland lake northeast of Cordoba



Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO member **Mark Amershek** has been around South America a bit. Of its 12 countries (13 if you count French Guiana, an “overseas department” of France), he has birded in seven, from Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru in the north to the Patagonian reaches of Argentina, South America's second-largest nation (and the world's eighth-largest).

But until this fall, Mark hadn't visited Argentina's north, which shares a zig-zaggy boundary with Bolivia and borders Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil, too. Nor had he covered as much birding territory on the ground as his Colorado-based tour group would on a three-week trek through northern Argentina to the Bolivian border this past October.

Once they had recovered from the 5,900-mile overnight flight Oct. 12 from Denver to Buenos Aires, the seven-member expedition (organized and led by expert Denver-area birder **Norm Erthal**) caught an hour-long flight inland Oct. 14 to the foothills hub of Córdoba. “And from there,” Amershek says, “it was basically driving, driving, driving, driving — north, north, north, north. We spent a lot of time in transit.”

Not that he's complaining. All the way up and back, they were stopping, stopping, stopping — and birding, birding, birding. With their van driver and guides, they logged more than 2,000 road miles — from the wide, paved, north-south spine of National

Continued on page 33



Red-face Guan, one of Mark's 65 lifers on the trip



Buff-breasted Wren



Jabiru, massive-billed stork of the tropics



Red-legged Sirema, elegant, raptor-like terrestrial bird of Argentine savannas

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 32*

Route 9 to lesser side roads and dirt and gravel tracks branching off into scrublands and wetlands, canyons and gorges, steppes, cloud forests and high Andean desert. And being south of the Equator, they were in the midst of Argentine spring, with lovely weather, flowers abloom, and birds everywhere.

They parked at vast, desert-basin lakes where tens of thousands of plovers and phalaropes shared the shallows with three kinds of flamingos. They crept along twisty canyon edges where Andean Condors (the world's largest birds of prey) swooped by at eye level. They hunkered together against the wind at a cairn of boulders marking a 15,000-foot pass through the Andes. "We never got skunked," Amershek says. "We always were getting good birds."

No kidding: Upon their return to Buenos Aires on Nov. 2 for the flight home, the group had recorded an astonishing 400 species on 179 eBird checklists. The birds ranged in size from the ostrich-like [Greater Rhea](#) (the continent's largest bird) to the [Red-tailed Comet](#), an Andean hummingbird spectacular even among exotic hummers. For Amershek, 65 of those species were new lifers, from the turkey-like [Red-faced Guan](#) to the intricately feathered [Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe](#).

Continued on page 33



The group at 15,000-foot Andean pass. Mark Amershek is front right, in floppy hat.



Plush-crested Jay



Day 1 birding in downtown Buenos Aires, where flocks of parrots and thrushes flew

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 33*

But lifers and amazing tallies weren't the main point for Amershek. "I just love birds. I *love* birds," he says, having pursued them the length of the Western Hemisphere — from Nome, Alaska to Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego — since catching the birding bug just 14 years ago. He's already planning another three-week trek next autumn to Chile, where he was set to go in 2020 until the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down. "It's going to be challenging," he says.

But first, a more immediate challenge: Sorting through and editing several hundred of the photos he took in northern Argentina. After his first swipe through them, Amershek shared with *The Lark Bunting* a tantalizing fraction of the images he made of the birds the Colorado group saw. From that Red-face Guan to the Red-tailed Comet, here's a gallery of some of Mark's best.



Red-tailed Comet, striking Argentine hummingbird



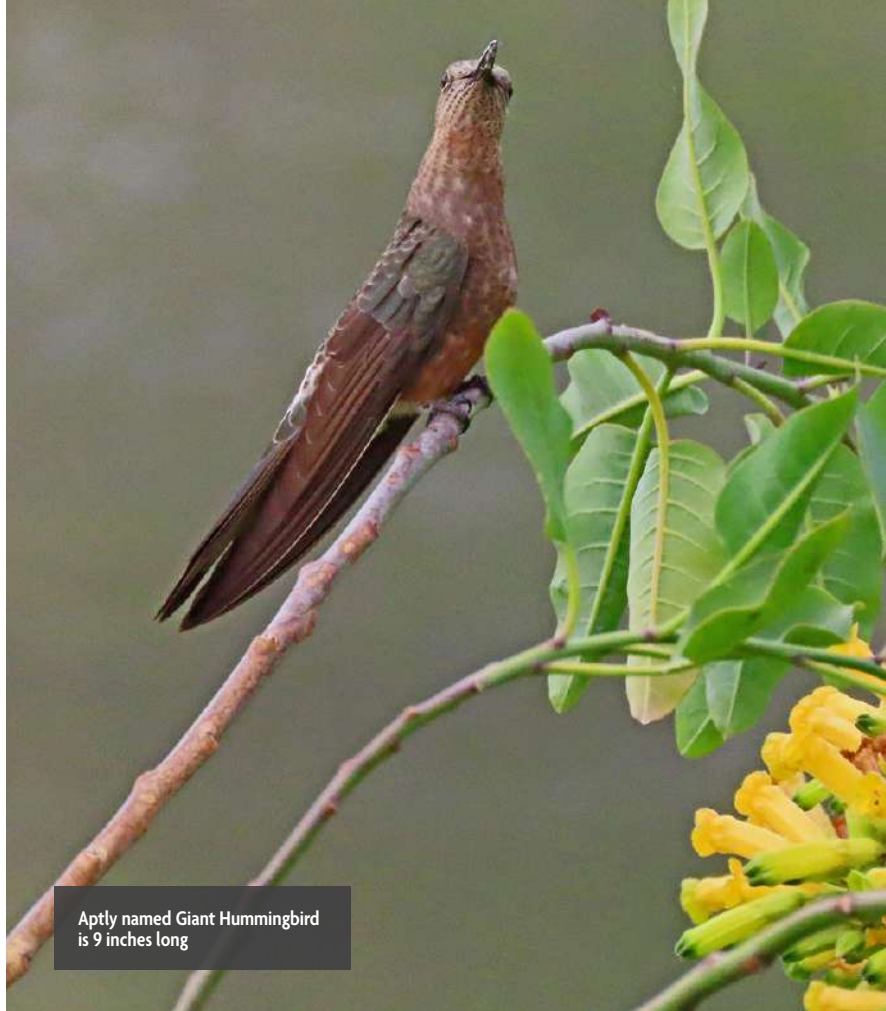
Blue and Yellow Tanager



Puna Teal, distinctive ducks of high Andes



White-tipped Plantcutter



Aptly named Giant Hummingbird
is 9 inches long



Lunch stop in Cafayate, a northwest
Argentine hub of vineyards



Road sign off the main highway



Weary Colorado birders await flight home from Buenos Aires airport



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY MID-WINTER BIRDING!

Andean Condor, world's largest
bird of prey, floats above canyon
just off Argentina's Highway 9



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 04 | APRIL 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Diving with dippers
in JeffCo's Bear Creek

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Northern Shrike
John M. Salisbury
CU Boulder South Campus



DFO member **John M. Salisbury**, a retired architect in Broomfield, started birding in earnest in 2019. A Texas

native and longtime Coloradan, he combines his photography with a love of nature. His “gateway bird” was a male American Kestrel, a flash of color in the crook of a tree on a snowy day.

ON THE COVER

Northern Shrike: Colorado’s winter “butcherbird” is looking homeward

Patrick O’Driscoll

On the cusp of spring, it’s about time for Colorado’s two species of shrike to pass and exchange the metaphorical baton — or is it a cleaver? Our unique passerine birds of prey are well-known, after all, as “butcherbirds” for their fascinating (and a bit grisly) method of storing food. They impale uneaten parts of their prey on thorns and wire-fence barbs, like butchers hanging up sides of meat in cold storage.

Although a few Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) hang around in winter beyond year-round haunts in the extreme southeast and southwest corners of the state, most of them will move north into Colorado soon from their winter retreats in Texas, New Mexico and Mexico. Meanwhile, their larger but less common relative, the Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*), is preparing to depart for faraway breeding grounds in northern Canada and Alaska.

While the Loggerhead is the only shrike in the world (there are 30 kinds) that resides entirely in North America, this month’s “cover bird” species, the Northern, gets farther around. It also ranges across much of Siberia in northeastern Asia. After arriving here in October from Alaska and Canada, Northern Shrike have been surviving largely on small birds and rodents; in Colorado’s winter there are none of the grasshoppers, beetles and other warm-weather insect prey that our Loggerheads thrive on in summer.

Though the two shrikes look quite similar, side by side they’re distinctive. The Northern is the larger of the two, is generally lighter gray, and its characteristic dark eye-stripe mask is narrower. The Northern nests widely in the far north but is less common than the Loggerhead. Its relative scarcity also means it is less well-known among researchers.

Then again, just 7 years ago, the Northern Shrike didn’t exist as a distinct and separate species. For decades it was regarded as a subspecies of the Great Gray Shrike until the two were split in 2017. Before that, from the 19th century to the 1930s, American scientists did regard the Northern as separate.

The bird on this month’s cover was spotted by **John Salisbury** on a Boulder Christmas Bird Count visit to the University of Colorado Boulder’s South Campus open space: “(W)e were getting near the end of the day . . . walking through some trees and spotted this guy enjoying the evening sun.”

That’s characteristic. Northern Shrikes perch and wait with nonchalance until a flock of smaller birds flies by. Then they’ll pursue, even straight into thick bushes. They even take larger birds on occasion, like doves, robins and jays.

From there, it’s off to the butchery. Fun fact: It comes as no surprise that the collective name for a flock or group these little carnivores is “an *abattoir* of shrikes” — from the French for “slaughter.”

— **Patrick O’Driscoll**, editor



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Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

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Next deadline: Sunday, March 31, 2024



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Seeing urban forests and improving the trees — for us *and* for the birds

Sharon Tinianow

A few months ago, an invitation to take a survey landed in my email inbox. The City of Denver Forester's Office was gathering information to create Denver's first Urban Forest Strategic Plan, a draft of which is due out this year.

I found this news encouraging. Trees provide a broad array of ecosystem services — lessening the urban “heat island” effect and stormwater runoff, for instance. And of course, trees also serve as vital habitat for birds. I took the survey but, impatient to wait for the city to deliver the plan to the public, I delved into what else I could learn online.



In 2022, Denver Parks & Recreation published “[Denver's Urban Forest](#),” a visionary analysis of the state of the city's tree management that recommends future steps to improve it. The shelter provided by Denver's urban tree canopy was estimated at only 11% percent, among the lowest coverages for all cities nationwide. A healthy urban forest could and should be “an effective, nature-based method for mitigating the effects of climate change,” the report noted, “while also providing numerous social, environmental, and economic benefits.”

The document also identified neighborhood equity as a major issue. Historically, discriminatory land use practices have resulted in affluent neighborhoods having far more of the beneficial effects of tree cover. Tree maintenance is another critical issue. Increasing the sheltering coverage of trees in Denver appropriately and equitably will require a great deal of interagency cooperation.

Missing from the document, however, was any mention of trees' role in providing habitat for wildlife. Was I wrong in assuming that birds also benefit from urban forest improvements? I continued my search for more information.

That led me to a 2021 article, “[Cities can help migrating birds on their way by planting more trees and turning lights off at night](#),” in *The Conversation*, a nonprofit news website devoted to explanatory science journalism. Author **Frank La Sorte** of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with contributions from Colorado State University biologist **Kyle Horton**, studied migratory bird species in 333 US cities. Using eBird data, they tracked migratory bird numbers in urban areas throughout the year.

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They also examined the effects of light pollution (harmful to birds in spring and fall), tree canopy (helpful in spring and summer) and impervious surfaces (helpful in reducing cold stress in winter) on bird numbers in cities. As their title suggests, they recommend that cities plant more trees and adopt lights-out programs.

Another study, "[The importance of street trees to urban avifauna](#)" in the journal *Ecological Applications*, looked at how trees planted in Los Angeles city rights-of-way affected bird populations. Authors **Eric M. Wood** and **Sevan Esaian** observed bird foraging behavior in street trees in a city where the tree canopy is denser and more varied in affluent neighborhoods, as in Denver. They concluded that focusing on greater equity across L.A. neighborhoods would increase the total tree canopy to benefit birds as well as humans. They noticed that foraging birds strongly preferred two native tree species over non-natives, suggesting that cities make native varieties a priority.

I look forward to seeing if Denver's plan will be informed by studies that clearly show, like these, how important urban forests are to birds. In the appendix of "Denver's Urban Forest" is a report of work done by students in the [Masters of the Environment](#) graduate program at CU Boulder. Their "[Urban Forestry, Equity, and Climate Resilience Toolkit](#)" recommends that Denver consider non-traditional and innovative partnerships to collaborate toward common goals.

Hmm. I wonder if the City of Denver would consider engaging with its local birding community in one of those innovative partnerships? After all, when you see someone stop on the street and gaze up into the canopy of a tree, nine times out of 10 that person is . . . a birder.

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*

FEEDBACK: YOUR VIEWS

The Lark Bunting welcomes your letters and feedback — criticisms and compliments, praise and scorn, and anything in between. Email yours to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or text him at 303-885-6955.

About those bird name changes . . .

I've read a lot lately, including in this newsletter ([Bird Essay, Feb-March 2024, p. 16](#)), about the American Ornithological Society's plan to [change the names of bird species named after people](#).

I would submit that the renaming of 152 species of birds in one fell swoop by the AOU is TAIHEN. In Japanese, "Taihen" stands for "terrible," in all the varying nuances we use for that word. Literally the characters mean "Big Change." Most of us do not like change — and this one is seismic.

Immediately, all the dozens of field guides and thousands of local checklists will be obsolete. Field trip leaders will be fumbling to remember the new politically correct names. Checklists in eBird will all be obsolete.

I wonder if anyone in the world knew that McCown (as in Longspur) or the legendary Audubon himself owned slaves — or if they even care, if perchance they did know?

I wish they would instead correct, little by little, names that make no sense at all, like Connecticut Warbler or Nashville Warbler. Or, for that matter, Sharp-shinned Hawk. I suppose the ornithologist who named that bird must have cut his finger on the type specimen.

W. Robert Shade III

Lakewood

[DFO member since 2005]

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO'S ANNUAL SPRING HAWK WATCH NOW UNDERWAY

Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge, DFO's annual effort to count birds of prey that migrate north along the Front Range each spring, began on Friday March 1. New personnel for the daily counts from Dinosaur Ridge, a foothills hogback in Jefferson County, include project assistant **Natalie Ushner-Arroyo**, official counter **Dustin Kohler**, and official observers **Audrey Anderson** and **Zach Haag**. They will join returning counters **Emma Riley** and **Ajit Antony** and project lead **Carol Cwiklinski**.

Hawk Watch relies heavily on volunteers to ensure count accuracy. Veteran counter **Dave Hill**, past DFO president and former Hawk Watch chair, has trained the 2024 crew of volunteers. But it's never too late to join the Hawk Watch volunteer team! Drop-ins are always welcome, and volunteers of all experience levels can participate. Learn more about participating in this, DFO's principal community science project, by visiting the [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch page](#) on the DFO website.



Hawk Watch staffers Natalie Ushner-Arroyo, Audrey Anderson and Zach Haag
Janet Peters

RECORD 2023 CHRISTMAS COUNT FOR COLORADO?

The results aren't all in, fully reviewed and final yet, but 2023 may have broken Colorado's statewide record for the Christmas Bird Count. **Brandon Percival**, regional editor for the Colorado CBC, reported on Feb. 10 via CoBirds that "already we are up to 209 species (usually right around 200, last year was lower than 200)." He said more than 650,000 individual birds had been counted, but "I'm waiting for a few more counts to be entered into the CBC Website, and details for a few rarities." His first report in mid-January, posted on [National Audubon's website](#) for the 123rd annual national count, had tallied 197 species in 51 individual counts around the state. Percival hopes to finish reviewing all the results by early April. Individual count results are available at this National Audubon link: <https://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>

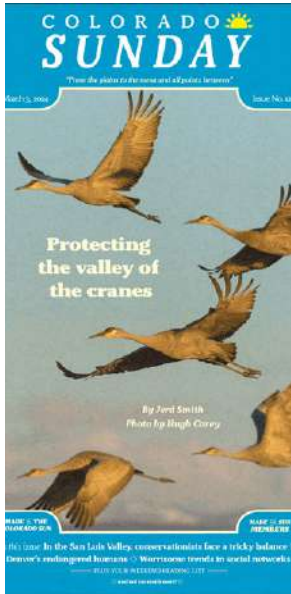
SPRING "GET INTO BIRDING" CLASS @ FRONT RANGE BIRDING

DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** will teach an eight-session course for beginning birders in April, May and June in partnership with [Front Range Birding Company](#) in Littleton. "Get Into Birding" will feature four 2-1/2-hour learning sessions on Wednesday evenings (April 17, May 1, May 15 and May 29), each followed 10 days later by a Saturday morning-long field trip (April 27, May 11, May 25 and June 8). The course, which costs \$150 per person, will cover birding basics, local and migratory bird ID, habitats, best local birding spots, and use of birding tools (eBird, Merlin ID, Sibley field guides, etc.). The in-class meetings will be 6:30–8 p.m. at Front Range Birding Company, 10146 W. San Juan Way #110, Littleton. The class is limited to 15 participants. To register, contact Front Range Birding at 303-979-2473.

"GRAINS FOR CRANES" AIDS SAN LUIS VALLEY'S FLOCKS

As the Monte Vista Crane Festival greets thousands of Sandhill Cranes in Colorado's San Luis Valley en route north this spring, an effort to help preserve resources for their migration stopover is gaining notice. A handful of local farmers is setting aside croplands within a 10-mile "Goldilocks zone" around Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge to help

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feed the flocks. It's called "Grains for Cranes," and it was started by [Colorado Open Lands](#), a nonprofit conservation group that seeks to preserve the state's land and water resources. The group has created a [9-minute video](#) to highlight the program and dramatize the threat from outside developers to the valley's groundwater and, thus, jeopardize the 7,000-year history of the cranes' spring and fall stopovers to rest and

recharge. All of this is explained in a Sunday feature story in *The Colorado Sun*, the Denver-based e-newspaper. For *The Sun's* full report, go to <https://coloradosun.com/2024/03/03/grain-for-cranes-program-sandhill-migration/>

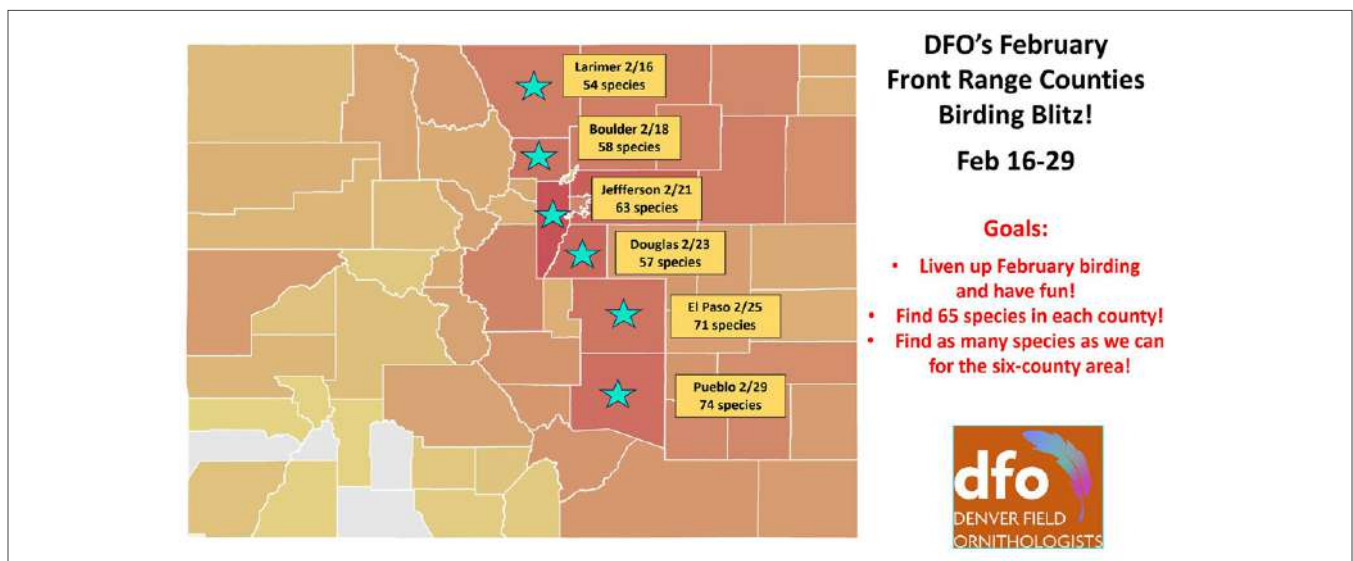
ONE-THIRD OF AMERICANS ARE . . . BIRDERS?!

That's what the US Fish & Wildlife Service reports in its latest [National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation report](#), released last fall with data compiled in 2022. The report says 96 million Americans 16 and older "closely observe, feed, or photograph birds; visit public parks to view birds, and/or maintain landscaping and natural areas around their home for the benefit of birds," according to a

[report by the Birding Wire](#) news compilation service. That news account suggests at least part of the boom in birding since the last time the survey was taken (2016) may be due to many more people worldwide taking up birding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Birding Wire also reports that Fish & Wildlife's survey found more than \$6 out of every \$10 spent in 2022 on wildlife-related recreation came from wildlife watching, "with birds cited as the greatest focus for wildlife watchers. Birders spent more than \$250.2 billion in 2022, including more than \$24.6 billion on equipment such as binoculars, cameras, bird food, and special clothing."

DFO FRONT RANGE BIRDING BLITZ ENLIVEN FEBRUARY

Our field trips program tried something new in February: A six-trip, north-to-south series called the Front Range Counties Birding Blitz. These one-day outings to Larimer, Boulder, Jefferson, Douglas, El Paso and Pueblo counties were spread across two weeks, Feb. 16-29. "February is sort of an ebb in the birding year here," DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** explained at the start, "so let's have fun trying to see how many species we can find." The challenging goal was 65 species per county, which Suddjian and his participants beat in El Paso and Pueblo and just missed in in Jeffco. But every day had at least 54 species, very respectable for a quiet, dead-of-winter month. Collectively, the Blitz birders tallied 109 species on 109 eBird checklists. You can read the overall blitz report on eBird here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/204488>



For DFO, a gathering question: *Zoom and in the room?*



Remember DFO meetings — in person? Do you miss those pre-pandemic days when our monthly programs drew us together in a room, not an online chat room?

After our club and virtually every other public organization stopped meeting together when COVID-19 went coronaviral in early 2020, the webinar platform Zoom enabled us to e-meet from home virtually and easily. Its convenience has allowed hundreds of us at a time to attend live but remotely (or to view quality recordings online later).

But since the pandemic receded, many of us have longed to bring the DFO flock back together again in person. The human-social element that bound our membership communally for decades now exists physically only on field trips or community science projects like Hawk Watch.

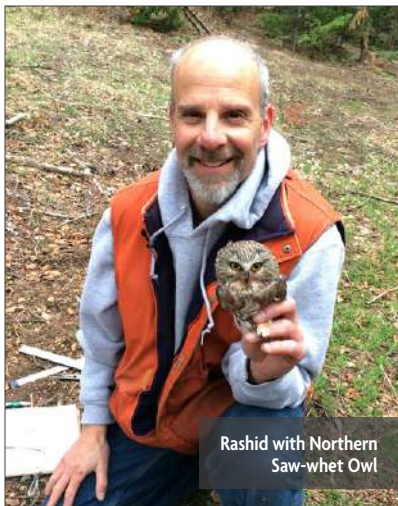
If you miss the in-person connection, consider this your opportunity to help revive meeting in person for some DFO social time around an interesting, entertaining program.

We don't intend to give up Zoom, because it enables so many more people to attend our monthly evening programs, some of them presented by speakers from half a world away. But the DFO Board wants to host a couple of in-person gatherings in 2024.

If you agree, will you consider volunteering some time, interest and ideas to this effort in the next two months?

If so, please contact DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com, and let's get together!





SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Small Mountain Owls of Colorado

Scott Rashid

Monday, March 25, 2024

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

That's no reprint from last year. Colorado's foremost expert on owls, **Scott Rashid**, is back by popular demand. For last September's DFO evening program, he presented an enlightening look via Zoom on "Owls of Northern Colorado," about the 11 species that can be found in the state's northern reaches.

This time, Rashid will home in more closely on four of those species with "Small Mountain Owls of Colorado," a new DFO evening program scheduled for **Monday, March 25 at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. His discussion will explore the natural history of the Northern Pygmy-Owl, Flammulated Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Boreal Owl. He has done extensive research work on this quartet of high-country species for the past 30 years and probably knows them better than anyone.

In fact, Rashid's first book, *Small Mountain Owls* (Schiffer, 2009), was the first ever published about these four owl species. In 2004, he located the first Flammulated Owl nest ever found in Rocky Mountain National Park. He also has found Northern Saw-whet Owl nests inside and outside the park, and confirmed that the Boreal Owl nests in the park. And since 1998, when he began studying Northern Pygmy-Owls in the park, Scott has located 18 different nests in and outside the park.

Rashid will discuss courtship, egg-laying, incubation dates, growth of the young, habitat preferences, food habits and more for these species. He presentation will include images and videos of the birds in their preferred habitats. (****IMPORTANT NOTE:** If you cannot "attend" this program live via Zoom on March 25, a recording of this presentation will be available for viewing on the "[Past Programs](#)" page of the DFO website for **ONLY ONE WEEK** afterwards at the presenter's request.)

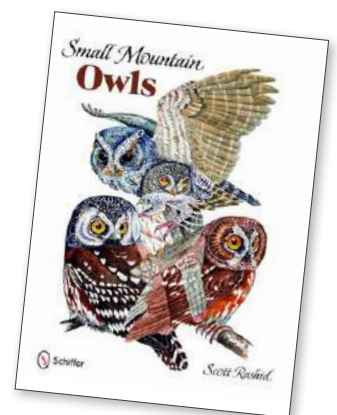
As creator and director of the nonprofit [Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute](#) (CARRI) in Estes Park,

Rashid and his team have placed more than 130 nest boxes for the various cavity-nesting species they study. Many of those nests have cameras, enabling the researchers to monitor nesting activity without bothering the birds.

Rashid founded CARRI in 2011, rehabilitating injured and orphaned birds in and around Estes Park and Rocky Mountain NP. CARRI operates a banding station each fall, capturing and banding both Northern Saw-whet and Boreal owls after dark. Since 2007, Rashid and his team have captured more than 350 Northern Saw-whets and 20 Boreals.

Besides his field research, Rashid has been painting, illustrating and writing about birds for nearly 35 years. His avian passion was sparked during boyhood in Wisconsin. Two years after receiving his state and federal bird banding permits in 1992, Rashid created a banding program at the YMCA of the Rockies outside Estes Park. It still operates today, the most popular program at the largest YMCA in the world, with thousands of guest-visitors each year. Ten years ago, Rashid and his volunteers banded their 10,000th bird there. In 1994, he became a licensed bird rehabilitator, caring for injured birds and returning hundreds back into the wild, including raptors, songbirds, hummingbirds and corvids.

Scott's other books include *The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study* and *Northern Goshawk, the Gray Ghost: Habits, Habitat, and Rehabilitation*, both published in 2015, and *Exploring the World of the Barn Owl: (An intimate look into their secretive lives)* in 2019.



SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

The Lonesome Whip-poor-will: The Untold Story of America's Most Iconic Bird



Jared Del Rosso

Jared Del Rosso
Monday, April 29, 2024
7 p.m. MDT

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

For DFO's April program, cultural sociologist and DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** will explore the largely untold story of his favorite bird, the Whip-poor-will. An almost mystical icon of early American culture, the species figured prominently in the seasonal lives of a largely still agrarian-oriented land.

The Lonesome Whip-poor-will: the Untold Story of America's Most Iconic Bird explores its place in the natural and cultural landscapes of America. The story is not only about the species itself, but also about us and how we understand changing relationships among birds, the natural world, and our own lives.

For centuries, Americans in the eastern US eagerly awaited the return of Eastern Whip-poor-wills to their breeding grounds. The song of the first returning bird meant an end to frost and the true beginning of spring. Local newspapers reported on the arrival of the birds, farmers began to plant frost-sensitive plants, and children knew they could go barefoot outside again. That first song was also said to predict the length of people's lives, grant wishes, cure backaches, and even guarantee wealth.

As ordinary folk listened for the bird, American musicians, poets, and writers made the Whip-poor-will a legend. Country singers transformed the birds into icons of lonesomeness and rural life. Poets and nature writers wondered about the species' strange, menacing name. Horror writers spun Whip-poor-wills into the stuff of nightmares.

But with time, says Del Rosso, something has changed. Since the 1970s, Eastern Whip-poor-will numbers have fallen by more than two-thirds. Fewer Americans encounter them regularly. Birders must work harder to add the species to their yearly checklists. Now the singers wax nostalgic, and naturalists pen eulogies. The birds went from unfamiliar to obscure. Today, they're on the brink of forgotten.

Del Rosso, who teaches at the University of Denver, is writing a book on Whip-poor-wills for New York University Press's "Animals in Context" series. He is also an avid birder and has led trips with Denver Field Ornithologists and the High Line Canal Conservancy. He's especially interested in nightjars (the greater family that includes Whip-poor-wills) and is counting the days until this year's return of nighthawks and poorwills to Colorado. His writing about birds and birding has appeared in this newsletter and on the Center for Humans & Nature's blog. For more on his upcoming book, visit his webpage at lonesomewhippoorwill.com.



Top:
Eastern Whip-poor-will
Tom Murray via Flickr

Bottom:
Poorwills painting by Alexander Wilson
American Ornithology

If you missed it: DFO's January program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian
Kris Haglund for
curating and posting the
program videos on the
DFO website on the
[Past Programs](#) page.



JANUARY 22

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow

WATCH ONLINE

Bulow, a semi-retired birding guide who was DFO president in 2005, lives in extreme south Texas, a wonderland of hotspots and opportunity. In this program, she breezily uploads abundant tips, travel logistics and species-specific intel for excursions in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, from bird-rich parks to the Brownsville city dump. “Not only are we on the flyway and get the rewards of migration,” she begins, “but we also have an abundance of resident birds and about 18 specialty birds” — Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and more. “So, pack your bags.” She dishes details on the most prized of the valley’s more than 500 species, from the Ringed Kingfisher (“The jumbo jet, a really big guy”) to the diminutive Black-crested Titmouse (“Look him up in the dictionary under ‘cute’”). The Golden-fronted Woodpecker, she adds, “is probably the first guy to come to citrus at feeders. They have citrus radar, and they are junkies.” In a word: Entertaining.



Rio Grande Valley counties in south Texas

If you missed it: DFO's February program



FEBRUARY 26

Gardening on the Wild Side

Jim Tolstrup

WATCH ONLINE



Jim Tolstrup at High Plains
Enviro Center
YouTube

Tolstrup, founder of the nonprofit [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland, delves into biology as he makes the case for restoring native plants, grasses, shrubs and trees across Colorado's urban, suburban and rural landscapes. He calls the center — which grows natives amidst a planned community where such vegetation is preferred — “a very hopeful vision for the future.” He coined “suburbitat” to describe his campaign to reduce and replace water-wasting turf lawns with natives that require little to no irrigation, attract pollinators, and feed and shelter wildlife, birds included. He takes note of Colorado's many pollinators (butterflies, birds and 936 native bee species) and gives numerous tips (and a handy fact sheet) on best plants for each season and conditions. He encourages native-plant growers to “be a lazy gardener,” letting spent stalks and dead plants go to seed through winter to benefit both next year's garden and the hidden insects that overwinter in that detritus.



Rocky Mountain Bee Plant

Cleome serrulata

- 1-3' tall annual; large pink to lavender flower heads; reseeds readily; sun to part shade, dry, well-drained; up to 7,500'; grow by scattering seed in fall
- Nectar for bees; attracts butterflies, hummingbirds, night flying moths; seeds provide food for songbirds

Slide from native plants presentation



DFO ELECTION

Election year? It's every year in DFO — and here comes ours

Mary Geder

If it's almost April, that means it's about time for Denver Field Ornithologists' annual election of officers and board directors. As in every year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the April balloting will be conducted via email. This year's balloting will start on **Monday, April 15**, with results to be announced at the program meeting on **Monday, April 29**, which doubles as the club's official annual business meeting.

Nominations Committee chair **Mary Geder** has assembled a draft slate of candidates for the offices of president, secretary and treasurer, and seats on the board of directors. DFO members are also welcome to nominate other members in good standing, including themselves, for any elective position. (Going into the election, at least one position, vice president, will be vacant.) DFO officers are elected for one-year terms (all with eligibility for re-election). Directors serve 3-year terms and also can be re-elected.

To nominate or to ask questions about the election, contact Geder by email at mfg5000@live.com. (Members without email can contact her by phone at 303-981-8823.) The deadline for nominations is **Monday, March 25**.

Declared candidates so far include three of the four current DFO officers. President **Sharon Tinianow**, elected last April after serving two years as vice president, is running for her second term. DFO Treasurer **Kathy Holland** and Secretary **Nate Bond** also will seek re-election to their positions. **Matt Rodgers**, who was appointed interim vice president in July 2023, will not stand for election, so his position will be vacant for the election unless a candidate steps forward.

Club members will also elect several directors for the DFO Board, whose 3-year terms and elections are staggered to maintain continuity. Seeking re-election this year is **Patrick O'Driscoll**, a board member since 2018 and editor of DFO's newsletter. In addition, **Susan Blansett**, DFO's immediate past president; **Mike Fernandez**, chair of DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee, and **Phil Waltz**, newly appointed Volunteer coordinator, all will seek election to the board, which currently has 11 members. The terms of two members, **Elaine Wagner** and **Karen Drozda**, also expire this year. They are not seeking re-election.

Look for more election details — including brief candidate bios and voting specifics for the online balloting — in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out the first full week of April.

IN MEMORIAM

Tuesdays with Ann: Birding friends remember Bonnell's warmth, expertise, dedication

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The passing of longtime DFO member and Tuesday Birders leader **Ann Bonnell** the day after Christmas 2023 stirred an outpouring among all who knew her. The Lark Bunting asked her birding friends, especially Tuesday Birders members, to share stories and thoughts of Ann. They were generous with their recollections, which we present here with appreciation.*

Continued on page 16



Ready to lead another Tuesday Birders meetup
Courtesy of Bonnell family

Cheerful chickadees

On my first outing with the Tuesday Birders 20 years ago, Ann warmly welcomed me and the other new members. She promised that she and the other veterans would share their expertise, and they certainly did! I remember her telling me that chickadees were one of her favorite species because they were so cheerful. I love them, too — and I think of Ann whenever I see one.

— **Mary Ann Tavery, Denver**

Tuesday Birders origins

Ann was a dear friend and neighbor from the day she and Jack and their two brilliant children moved into our Littleton neighborhood back in 1976. She profoundly affected so many lives in the birding world and beyond with a positive impact impossible to measure.

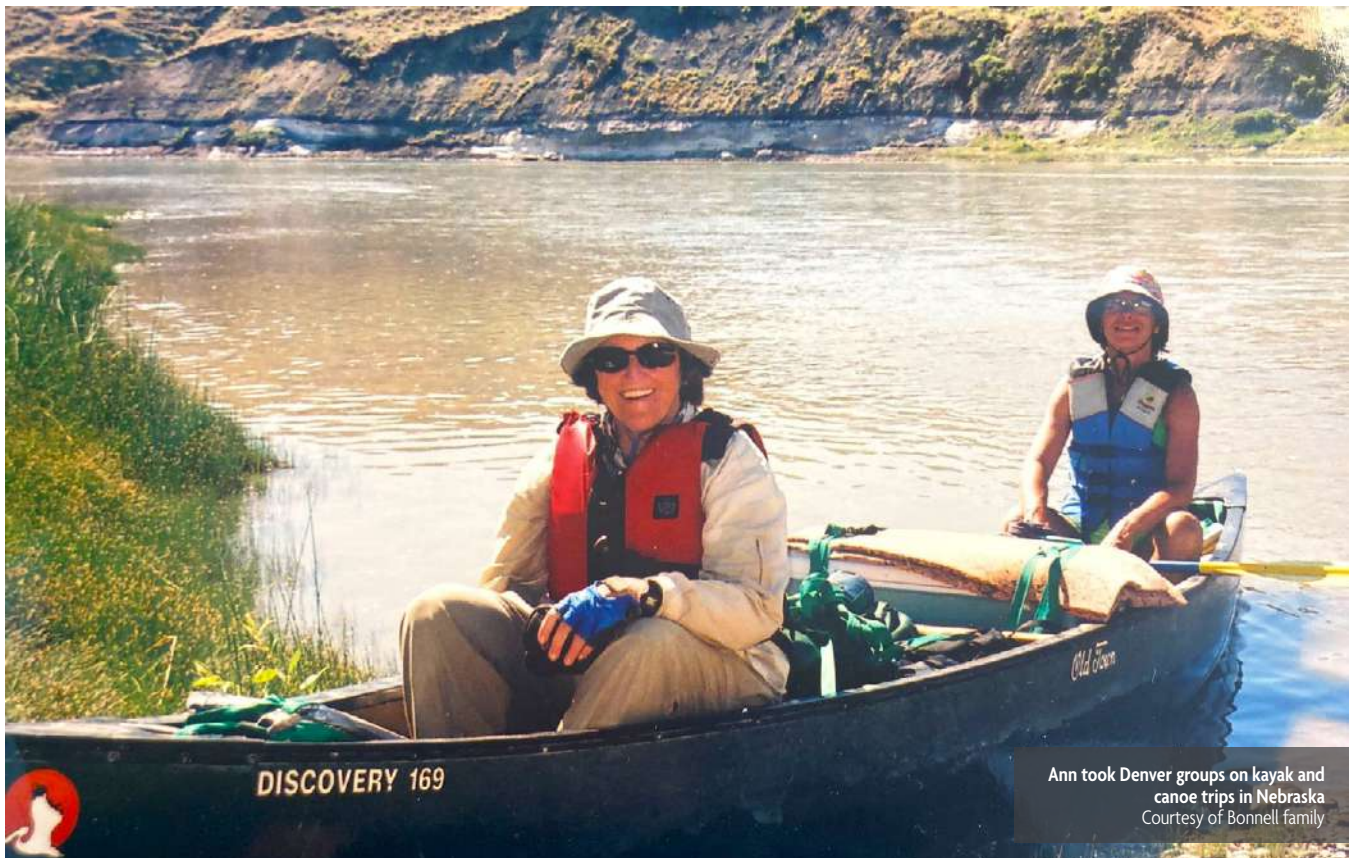
Back in the late 1970s, while our kids (two each) were in school, Ann and I became so close that we rode a Schwinn

tandem bicycle together daily for exercise. One particular Tuesday, pedaling out to Chatfield State Park, we came across a sizable group of people, all with binoculars. Pulling over, we met their leader, a blond lady with the brightest smile. It was **Patty Echelmeyer** [*a former president of DFO*], with students from the birding class she led at North Jefferson County Adult Education. They'd start each class session at Fruitdale Elementary, then head out into the field. Ann and I enrolled in the very next session and became regulars. It was the beginning of birding for both of us.

When Patty decided to retire, her group had become such a regular thing that we all wanted to continue on. But who would lead us? Ann stepped right up! Thus began Tuesday Birders. When Ann herself decided to retire more than 40 years later, she enlisted **Cynthia Madsen** and **Dave Hill** to take over. And so the beat goes on: If it's the second weekday, the Tuesday Birders are out somewhere with binoculars, scopes, cameras . . . and birds!

— **Barbara Livingston, Littleton**

Continued on page 17



Ann took Denver groups on kayak and canoe trips in Nebraska
Courtesy of Bonnell family

Wonderful friends

After I retired in fall of 2004, I signed up the following spring for **Hugh and Urling Kingery's** Beginning Birder class with Denver Audubon. Among other things, they gave us a handout listing various birding activities, including Tuesday Birders. I soon phoned Ann about it, and she invited me to go with her my first time, maybe June 2005. Then she told me about the carpools — Tuesday Birders who shared rides each week. Since I live in Aurora, I contacted the Southeast Denver group, and soon I was carpooling with several amazing and wonderful women, including **Mary Jane Black, Ellie Jones, Joyce Quigley** and **Peggy Roberts**. We did so for years.

Sharing Tuesday Birders with them taught me a lot and brought me more friends and acquaintances with whom to explore places I'd never ever heard of until we went there. This led to yet more activities, including volunteering with Colorado Parks & Wildlife.

With time and age, some of the carpools had to scale back their participation. When Ellie had to give up driving after moving into a senior apartment community, I took her with me to Tuesday Birders a few times a year, whenever our schedules fit. Last year she moved to a senior complex in Steamboat Springs, near one of her sons and his family. Now, my husband and I plan to move out of state this year to be near family, too. We'll no longer be Tuesday Birders, but we have so many memories we would never have made if not for Ann Bonnell. She was one of the most outstanding people I have ever known.

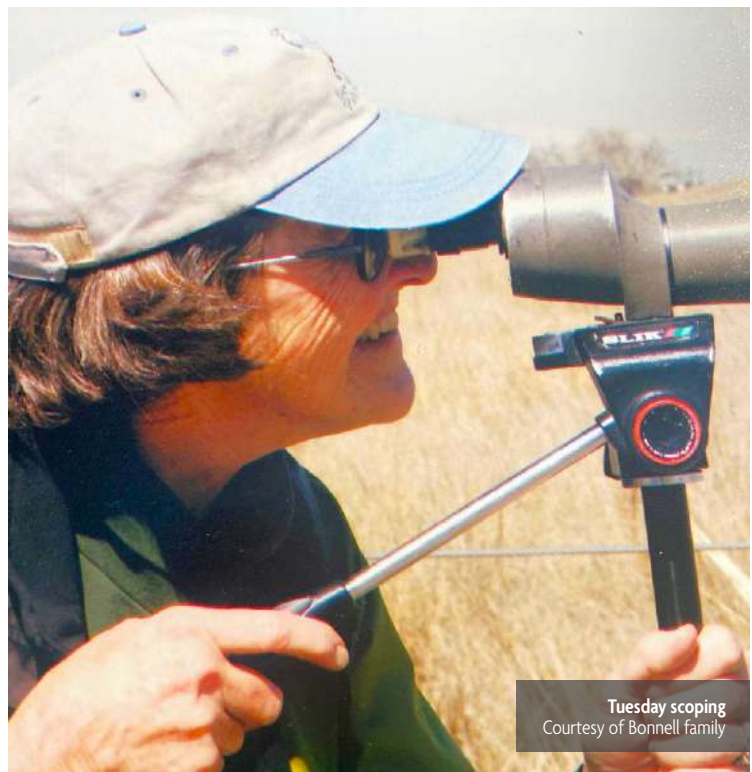
— **Jean Stevenson, Aurora**

Conservation warrior

Ann's passing is a HUGE loss to conservation and birding habitat preservation in the Denver area. She was instrumental in stopping a huge planned water park at Deer Creek in Chatfield State Park. She also was instrumental in establishing all the wildlife corridors and trails within the proposed



Jean Stevenson and Ellie Jones at Ann's memorial bench in Bear Creek Lake Park in 2022
Courtesy of Jean Stevenson



Tuesday scoping
Courtesy of Bonnell family

Continued on page 18



TrailMark subdivision in Littleton, just across Wadsworth from the park's main entrance. She also worked tirelessly to preserve more of the trees around Chatfield as the planned reservoir expansion went forward. The water districts wanted to remove ALL of them! Such a great loss.

— **Joey Kellner, Littleton**

Family roots

Most memorable for me was a three-day DFO trip many years ago with Ann to [Crescent Lake Wildlife Refuge](#) in the Sand Hills of Nebraska. Her parents had been the refuge's first managers back in the 1930s. Ann had arranged for us to meet the current manager, himself a history buff, as soon as we arrived. First he shared with us a scrapbook of historical details and tidbits about the refuge. Then he gave us a tour of the buildings around the headquarters, including the one Ann's parents most likely lived in during their posting. What an unforgettable treat! To this day, I remain grateful to Ann for sharing that special place on a special trip.

— **Chris Owens, Longmont**

Tireless helper

I met Ann Bonnell in the early 1990s. Although I lived up in Evergreen and belonged to the local Audubon chapter, Ann enthusiastically helped us on many occasions, particularly driving up to join in our Christmas Bird Count. She even stayed long into the evening after the count to join in our "great tally rally" and chili dinner. Several of us Evergreen birders returned the favor, joining Tuesday Birders down in Denver and helping with her annual Christmas Bird Count at Fairmount Cemetery. I loved birding with Ann at Roxborough SP, which she knew with her eyes closed. One more exceptional time was in 2008, when she led 11 of us on a Denver Audubon cruise up Alaska's Inside Passage and on to Denali. What an inspiration (and mentor) she was to me. Ann's tireless enthusiasm for all things wild was astonishing. Rest in peace, Ann, and thank you for your unending friendship.

— **Karel Buckley, formerly of Evergreen, now Mancos**

"Anemic whistle"

Ann was a wonderful Tuesday Birders leader, which is where I knew her from mostly. I was in the group at least 10 years regularly until my mobility began to decrease. I attend once or twice a year now, and I still have some good friends there. I'll always remember that Ann had an anemic whistle with which she tried to corral us when it was time to start the walk. Ann was always a positive personality.

— **Will Burt, Lakewood**

Continued on page 19

A blizzard of laughter

Ann Bonnell and I became fast friends from the start — my first Tuesday Birders outing sometime in 2009. I admired her down-to-business demeanor, her sense of humor and her love of nature. Knowing she could teach me so much, I joined her on as many of her bird counts and outings as possible. I was never disappointed; I learned so much as I watched her shine in these leadership roles.

We shared many adventures, but the most vivid in my mind was during the Vance Creek Christmas Bird Count in mid-December of 2014. I was Ann's only passenger as she drove her ancient Subaru (barely more clearance than my Prius) over snow-packed roads towards Evans Ranch west of Evergreen — and into a blinding snowstorm. She had a death grip on the steering wheel (and I had one on the dashboard) as plumes of snow obscured our way despite the flap-flap-flap of the windshield wipers.

Suddenly Ann shouted: "The car is slipping off the road! We're heading toward the ditch!" But skillfully and without further drama, she maneuvered us to a safe stop. Luckily, not far behind was **Karel Buckley**, to the rescue in her more modern Subaru. Except — Karel already had a full carload of counters! The luggage rack wouldn't do, so Ann and I squeezed into the cargo space behind the back seat. When the others finally popped open the tailgate after we reached ranch headquarters, we both burst out laughing as we unfolded from our cramped quarters.

I am forever thankful that Ann was in my life, and I'll never forget the parting words she always gave me: "Cheers, hugs, and stay well."

— **Cynthia Madsen**, *Centennial, and Tuesday Birders co-leader*



Ann, right, and Cynthia Madsen in tight quarters after 2014 snowstorm rescue
Karel Buckley

Continued on page 20

The Ann I miss

As I began to put these thoughts down, it came to me that her real gift was her effect on each and every person she met. For me, it began in 2014. Recently retired, I was looking ahead to years of travel, art, gardening, and reading. Then I met Ann Bonnell with her Tuesday Birders at Roxborough State Park. For me, a casual birder, it changed my life. Living near each other, we were in the same carpool every Tuesday. Revisiting all the local parks, I learned where birds built their nests, which ones migrated, their different behaviors, and how to tell the song of an American Robin from a Black-headed Grosbeak.

See where my previously planned retirement was going? Such a wonderful leader — Ann knew her birds by sight and sound and took the time to teach you how to as well. She knew EVERYONE and was involved in EVERYTHING. Soon I was volunteering at Denver Audubon, going to DFO meetings, doing all the seasonal counts, helping Ann at presentations, joining the “Save Chatfield” cause, counting waterfowl along the South Platte with Carson Nature Center, and of course, birding weekly with Tuesday Birders. I now travel to great birding areas, armed with Ann’s advice because she ALSO went EVERYWHERE!

Ann was always thanking me for my help, but I was the one who benefited so much more. I am so grateful that she introduced me to this wonderful world of birds, nature, people and purpose! She was intelligent, kind, and always interested in you, whoever you were. That’s the Ann I miss.

— **Betty Glass, Littleton**

Gleeful love of life

In 2013, I was fortunate enough to join Ann’s annual Niobrara River kayak trip. While hiking near the river one day, we came upon a waterfall. Ann obviously had planned ahead for this; she already had her bathing suit on under her clothes! She stripped down and waded in, hooting with glee despite the sudden chill of this natural shower. Ann’s absolute love of life was apparent to everyone. What a treasure she was, and so full of kindness.

I knew very little about birding when I went on that Nebraska trip. Several of the others seemed so knowledgeable about the birds around us. When I asked how they knew so much, they

told me about Tuesday Birders. After we returned to Denver, I began to attend those weekly outings, too. I became a Tuesday Birder. It’s another reason I’m so glad I was able to join that Niobrara adventure!

— **Sue Knight, Denver**

Delightful expert

Ann was such a wonderful and delightful leader and friend. I cherish memories of hours I spent with her over many years as a Tuesday birder. In 2006, I also joined Ann’s regular Niobrara River kayaking trip in Nebraska. It was well-planned, of course: That’s Ann. On our way up, we detoured to see “**Buffalo Bill**” Cody’s ranch in North Platte, and I remember watching Redheaded Woodpeckers as we ate lunch. When we reached the river, the place we were staying had two new 25-bed cabins, so we were settled in comfortably for three days, with wonderful meals and sack lunches prepared by Ann’s friend, Carolyn. We kayaked on the first and third days, and drove around to bird on the middle day, including in Smith Falls State Park. We all loved the trip.

One more special memory is the time Ann led Tuesday Birders out to Pawnee Buttes for the day. She was in my car as she directed us onto a sand/dirt track off the main paved road. Soon the driving became impossible! I’d still be stuck there if Ann hadn’t expertly instructed me how to turn the car around in such a narrow, extremely small space. Heading south later at the end of our long day, the sky just east of us turned pitch black. Once we got home, I learned that we were driving parallel to a tornado!

— **Barbara Isaac, Lakewood**

Champion for nature — and nature lovers

Ann was a strong personality who had her own ideas about how things should be. Heaven help the wayward woodrat that strayed into the Denver Audubon offices or the garter snakes that trespassed in Ann’s yard. As a Tuesday Birder, I was privileged to carpool with Ann for many years. I learned so much from her. If ever there were to be a disaster, I already knew where I’d head first — to Ann’s house. I knew she’d be fully prepared for anything.

Continued on page 21

Those of us who love nature are indebted to Ann, a conservation champion who spent countless hours and years on our behalf, fighting to preserve habitats and the wildlife in them. She attended hearings, wrote letters, and lobbied policy makers — and she worked in equal measure to support those who shared her love of the natural world, especially birds. She was the prime mover in keeping Tuesday Birders viable and vital across four decades and counting.

I know Ann would want her legacy to be for us to follow her example and be tireless advocates for nature.

— **Bill Turner, Littleton**

Rest in peace

Ann's legacy is remarkable. Her dedication and leadership over the years have left an indelible mark on our community and the world of birding. We dearly miss her contributions, but we will surely sense her soaring spirit as we scan the skies at every Tuesday Birders outing. Rest in peace, Ann — you'll continue to inspire us all.

— **Dave Hill, Centennial,**
Tuesday Birders co-leader



Ann Bonnell
Courtesy of Bonnell family

IN MEMORIAM

Ann Bonnell life celebration set for April 5 at Crown Hill

Patrick O'Driscoll

On the day after Christmas 2023, longtime DFO member **Ann Bonnell**, leader of the popular Tuesday Birders meetup group for decades, died. Now her family and friends are preparing to remember her in a special springtime event.

A “celebration of life” gathering for Bonnell is scheduled for **Friday, April 5 at 2 p.m.** at the [Pavilion of Reflection](#) in Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge (7777 W. 29th Ave.). For those unable to attend, the Crown Hill/Dignity Memorial website will contain a link on [Ann's obituary page](#).

In the spirit of remembering Ann as a fine birder and even finer friend, attendees are encouraged to considering birding in the cemetery or neighboring Crown Hill Park before or after the celebration. “We all know Ann would have,” says her friend **Cynthia Madsen**, who became co-leader of Tuesday Birders in June 2021 after Ann completed more than 40 years leading the weekly outings.

Bonnell, the recipient in 2009 of the Ptarmigan Award, Denver Field Ornithologists' highest honor for volunteerism, was 85 at her death on Dec. 26. Born the daughter of husband-and-wife national wildlife refuge managers, she grew up to love and fearlessly advocate for nature, wildlife and habitat. Although justly hailed for decades of activism in a broad array of conservation causes, Ann is best remembered in birding circles for her years of leadership in Tuesday Birders.

The weekly outings first came together in the early 1970s under **Patty Echelmeyer**, another late longtime DFO member (d. March 20, 2023). When Echelmeyer and her husband began to travel in the late 1970s, participants wanted to continue meeting, and one of them, Ann Bonnell, volunteered to coordinate. Over the next 40-plus years, she led hundreds of the Tuesday birding walks, which grew in popularity, sometimes drawing more than three dozen birders.

During the COVID-19 pandemic's interruption of in-person gatherings in 2020-21, Ann passed the torch to Madsen and former DFO president **Dave Hill**, who as co-leaders resumed Tuesday Birders outings on June 13,

Continued on page 22



Happy baby Ann
Courtesy of Bonnell family



Playing Annie Oakley
Courtesy of Bonnell family

BONNELL CELEBRATION *cont from page 21*

2021. The following January, Bonnell moved into an assisted-living and memory care residence in Lakewood. But her Tuesday Birders friends had not forgotten her. That spring, on Tuesday, May 31, 2022, they donated and dedicated a park bench in Bear Creek Lake Park with a plaque in Ann's honor.

Less than a week after her death, Audubon's Denver Urban Christmas Bird Count on New Year's Day was dedicated to Bonnell. Longtime count coordinator **Hugh Kingery** said Ann "helped organize the Fairmont/Lowry section of our count for many years" and that she "contributed much more than that to our Colorado birding community."

Since her passing, Bonnell has been memorialized in tributes online by family and friends. Besides DFO's obituary in our previous issue of [The Lark Bunting](#) (page 15), they also include:

- [Official obituary \(funeral home website\)](#)
- [Denver Audubon](#)
- [PLAN Jeffco open space advocacy group](#), where she served on the board
- [Evergreen Audubon](#)

Ann's survivors include daughter **Mary Ann** and son **John Bonnell**, his wife **Sarah Benson**, and their sons **Max** and **Jacob**; and nephew **William Krummes**, his wife **Brigitte**, and their daughter **Lucia**.

The family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to [EarthJustice](#), [Denver Audubon](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#), [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#), or [Denver Field Ornithologists](#).



Ann's 85th birthday in 2023
Courtesy of Bonnell family

ESSAY

Where did all the House Sparrows go? Next question: Why should we care?

Jared Del Rosso

How should birders feel about the decline of House Sparrows?

In 2016, my partner and I moved into our new home in Centennial. As any birder would, I started keeping a yard list. My early efforts were modest, as there was just too much to do inside the house. A Dark-eyed Junco and Spotted Towhee appeared on my first checklist. My second records that American Crows chased a Cooper's Hawk into the yard. A pair of Eurasian Collared Doves, the most common introduced species in my yard, were probably none too happy with that.

House Sparrows soon followed. My eBird records tell me I first spotted one on March 20, 2016. In early April, a pair. The species was common around our new yard then, and it would stay so through 2017.

And then, in 2018, something changed. House Sparrows don't appear on any of my yard lists that year. It was no anomaly. I've recorded House Sparrows in my yard only four times since then: three in 2019 and once in 2021.

I'm not the most rigorous backyard birder, so it's possible I've missed a few House Sparrows over the years. But other common suburban birds — Black-capped Chickadees and House Finches, especially — remain constants in my yard.

Success, right? We're meant to "manage" introduced species like House Sparrows and European Starlings around our yards and nest boxes. Certainly, I was trying. Once I noticed that rotting nestboxes put up by a previous owner were attracting House Sparrows, I removed them. I also dug up the yard's Forsythia, a European and Asian shrub whose tangle of branches seemed to attract House Sparrows.

And a funny thing happened once these too common non-natives disappeared. I started missing them. I know that's a taboo emotion to have for an invasive species. But when I noticed that House Sparrows had gone missing elsewhere, I

got a little worried. Despite our thoroughly suburbanized area, I struggled to find them around local open spaces and trails.

Don't get me wrong. I can still find a House Sparrow when I "need" one for, say, a local Big Day count. I just head to a shopping center. But is this decline the victory for biodiversity that I'd hoped for? Or is it a sign of broader species decline and loss? Which then begs a further question: How should we feel about this species we've been trained to vilify?

Making of a "trash" bird

House Sparrows (also known as English Sparrows) were brought to the US from Europe in the early 1850s. Within 50 years, they owned the country, fed in part by foraging undigested hay and grain from the plentiful horse manure of the pre-automobile era. Yet, by the early 1940s, House Sparrows outnumbered people, peaking at an estimated 150 million birds.

Their ultra-commonness has done House Sparrows no favors. At worst, birders call them "trash birds." I suspect even the most open-minded of us regard the species as not worth counting. When's the last time your encounter with a House Sparrow was the highlight of a birding outing? Was it ever?

Their drab brown, gray and black plumage isn't particularly likeable. Even the cleanest portions appear dusty. House Sparrows forage in dirty corners of our streets, efficient finders of whatever crumbs we've dropped.



House Sparrow female in Denver City Park
Patrick O'Driscoll

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But they can also wreak havoc on our native species. Here is author **Peyton Marshall**, in [*The New York Times*](#):

Ever since my mother joined the North American Bluebird Society . . . she's had it out for the English house sparrow — a bird that, when it isn't devouring butterflies and yellow flowers, is pecking out the brains of bluebird mothers, dumping their lifeless bodies in the grass and then throwing their children out to die.

Such hostility isn't new. In their journal paper "[Dirty Birds, Filthy Immigrants, and the English Sparrow War](#)," sociologists **Gary Alan Fine** and **Lazaros Christoforides** document how ornithologists and others in the late-19th century used anti-immigrant rhetoric to turn public attention against the species.

Here in Denver, **W.H. Bergtold**, one of the [city's first ornithologists](#), cheered on the House Sparrow's urban decline with the rise of the automobile in the early 1900s. As cars replaced horses, horse droppings, a food source for urban sparrows, also disappeared. In a [1921 article in *The Auk*](#) on Denver's House Sparrow population, Bergtold professed the hope that cars would make the species' existence so "hazardous and fatal as to drive it largely out of the business areas."

Decline of the species

But then we realized that all this reflected a deeper pattern. We weren't losing just a few birds here and there to cars or managed landscapes. *Birds of North America* has noted a decrease of about 2.6% a year in House Sparrow numbers since the late 1960s. A [recent study](#) by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology used FeederWatch data to assess populations between 1996 and 2016. While researchers found no declines in rural areas, they did track House Sparrow falloffs in both the proportion of FeederWatch sites reporting the species and the size of its flocks.

The story in Denver and its suburbs may be even more stark. Christmas Bird Count data show precipitous declines. Until 2010, Denver Urban CBC participants regularly tallied 1,300-2,400 House Sparrows each year. In the decade and a half since, we haven't reached 1,000. The lows are particularly startling. Fewer than 200 birds were counted in both 2016 and 2019, and in 2021, counters logged just 119, a new low.

Why the recent overall decline? *Birds of North America* lists changes in farming practices. Improved efficiency — less spillage of seed and fewer weeds — leaves less behind for foraging House Sparrows. So do changes in crop spraying and pesticide use. Still unclear, however, is whether or how these factors explain the drop in urban and suburban populations.

This brings me back to my original question. How should US birders feel about the decline of House Sparrows? If it were as simple as a victory for native birds against an invader, I might share the knee-jerk reaction to celebrate. Hooray for "sparrow-proof" nestboxes and feeders, restored native landscapes unappealing to House Sparrows, and the return of more native species.

Except that, as House Sparrows decline, they often leave empty ground. Overall bird numbers already are [on the decline](#) across the country and across habitats. Who refills the House Sparrow's niche?



House Sparrow male on rural fence
Patrick O'Driscoll



At a Denver backyard feeder
Patrick O'Driscoll

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Fellow travelers

Consider, for instance, our native House Finch, a fellow traveler of the House Sparrow. Both use similar nestboxes, and they are often seen as in competition for resources. As Bergtold documented House Sparrows' decline in the early 1900s, he rejoiced in good fortune for the finches:

In previous years the writer spent a good deal of his spare time, when at home, in protecting his House Finches from the ravages of the English Sparrow, but it has not been at all necessary during the past three years. This relief from sparrow depredations, it would seem, has not been due to increased protection, but rather to the absence of sparrows; the fact is there have been fewer sparrows to harass the finches.

No such relief today, however. House Finch numbers in the US have been dropping by 3.3% a year, a fall similar to House Sparrows' decline.

In Europe, House Sparrows are now a [conservation issue](#). Could it be that one day, US birders, like their European counterparts, might root for a yard sighting of a now-uncommon species? Or should we embrace the House Sparrow sooner, realizing that their decline is sign of a wounded environment? Might we instead rejoice at seeing one feed alongside our invited natives? Might we celebrate the successful rearing of House Sparrow nestlings into adults as symbolic of a natural world not yet done in?

Bergtold thought that to save House Finches, we had to sacrifice House Sparrows. Today, perhaps we'll need to learn to accept and even save one "House" species to keep and preserve the other — and thus, our avian neighborhood.

Jared Del Rosso, a birder since 2012, is a sociologist who dabbles in nature writing. Besides The Lark Bunting, he contributes to the Center for Humans and Nature's [Stories & Ideas](#) section and blogs about birds at [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Female House Sparrow on a rural Colorado fence
Patrick O'Driscoll



A suburban Denver flock in 2021
Patrick O'Driscoll

Chico Basin: Now closed 'til late April, when new rules and narrow dates apply

Patrick O'Driscoll

As previously announced, open-entry, anytime birding at Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties officially ended on Feb. 29. Although no barrier gate or warning signs went up at the ranch's iconic entryway, birders and all other non-ranching visitors are now barred from the state-owned, 87,000-acre expanse — for the next two months, at least.

Come April 29, the ranch — with perhaps Colorado's most abundant array of seasonal bird visitors — will reopen for a tight, 5-week window of limited birder access for spring migration. That timetable coincides with the seasonal operation of a longtime bird banding station by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

Unlike in previous years, however, visitation and movement on the ranch will be severely restricted. Visitors will have to book reservations online in advance for a day visit. The definition and length of a birding “day” will shrink drastically to only six hours (7 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Access will be limited to a maximum of just 20 birders a day.

What's more (or in this case, less), birders will be confined to only three locations (all eBird hotspots) on the vast ranch: the wooded area around the banding station (El Paso County), the ranch's “headquarters pond” and adjacent trees, marsh and wooded area (Pueblo County), and Rose Pond, a separate body of water, wetlands habitat and woods about a mile south of headquarters. All other places where birders used to go, including three other eBird hotspots, are now permanently off-limits.

The changes were decreed by the Colorado State Land Board, which owns the property and leases it for cattle ranching. For more than two decades, current leaseholder Ranchlands (the **Duke Phillips** family) freely invited birders onto the ranch virtually any day or time. Another ranching company outbid Ranchlands for a new lease and will take over Chico Basin after the Phillipses' lease runs out on Dec. 31. But the land board unilaterally decided to assume oversight of non-livestock uses, including birding, for the rest of 2024. That ends anytime entry for birders 10 months sooner than Ranchlands would have ended it.

In the meantime, Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs area chapter of National Audubon, is preparing to administer the land board's restrictive new birding regime. As the birding-related organization closest geographically to the ranch, Aiken signed a no-fee lease with the board to handle day-to-day supervision of limited birding. It will collect a \$15-per-birder fee to defray the cost of administration, including liability insurance, an online reservations system, portable toilet rental, and other operating costs. The land board also ordered that Aiken must split any revenues with the Bird Conservancy.

“Birders will need to register and pay ahead of time, likely up to 7 days in advance, through a system to be set up by Aiken Audubon,” Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges** wrote in an informational note Feb. 1. “Groups will be able to register further



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in advance, possibly 30 days prior to visiting, though that's not yet been worked out."

For years, DFO has led several such field trips to the ranch each year, usually on weekends. But there has been talk of steering group outings to weekdays to allow entry for more individual birders on peak weekends when the new 20-birder limit would quickly max out.

After the spring migration window closes June 2, Chico Basin Ranch will again be off-limits to birding and other non-ranching visits through most of summer until Sept. 2, when an equally short fall season starts. As in spring, it will coincide with the banding station calendar. This five-week season will end Oct. 6, well before the last of autumn's migrant birds pass through. An almost 7-month fall-winter-spring void for public birding on Chico Basin Ranch then will commence before the next short spring season in April 2025.

"This first year will likely be bumpy as we work to comply with the requirements," Hodges wrote in conclusion, "so we ask for your patience . . . Hope to see you on the ranch."



Curve-billed Thrasher on ranch gate
Patrick O'Driscoll

SUPPORTING DFO

Trim your taxes — and help DFO, too

Roger Koester

You may be focused just now on preparing your income tax filings for tax year 2023. But there's no better time than now to consider using the federal tax system to DFO's advantage and your own, too.

Two words: charitable giving.

If you're over age 72, you must make a required minimum withdrawal from your retirement accounts each year, and pay income tax on the taxable amount of that mandatory withdrawal. That's important for charitable giving because people who take that "Required Minimum Distribution" (RMD for short) can donate some or all of their IRA distribution directly and tax-free to a qualified nonprofit — like Denver Field Ornithologists.

People in this instance can make such direct donations any time during the year, whenever they make these required withdrawals from retirement savings. Here's one more abbreviation: QCD, short for "Qualified Charitable Distribution." That's what such a donation is.

If you are now required to take a minimum distribution in 2024, consider this strategy to make some or all of it a QCD to exempt the amount of the donation from your taxable income. You don't even need to itemize your taxes to do this, either. It's a direct reduction in taxable income. You win, and so does DFO.

There is one important caveat: Whatever funds you choose to contribute to charity as a QCD *must* be donated directly from your IRA to DFO (or to any qualifying nonprofit). If you withdraw the funds first and then donate them, that doesn't count and won't qualify for the tax exemption.

Know this, too: Other restrictions may apply for some individuals. For more about all of this, and if and how it might apply to your specific situation, contact your tax adviser or retirement provider first.

Roger Koester, a DFO member since 2018, is chair of the Finance Committee and a member of the DFO Board. Before retiring, he worked in student financial aid for several universities and was active in national, state, and regional professional associations.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

January, February DFO trips In Focus

In the dead of winter 2024, DFO field trips were alive and lively, with 21 destinations in January and 19 in February. Of those 40 trips, participants took pictures of “birders birding” on 21 of them. (And BTW, on one day, Jan. 28, DFO led FOUR different outings with a combined 34 participants!)

If you're on a DFO trip in March, take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best: folks hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, all eyes on a distant bird, or just a candid moment. We'll run one from each trip in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out by April 10 or thereabouts.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month — **Sunday, March 31**. And don't forget: photos of field trip *people*, please, not birds. Thanks!

JANUARY 1 Pueblo area

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Anne Craig, Archer Silverman, Bonnie Prado,
Courtney Rella, Frederick Caskey, Jennifer Tonge,
Ken Wat, Oliver Urdiales, Robert Tonge,
Sue Summers, Timothy Condon, Betsy Goodwin

**New Year's Day birders scope
Lake Pueblo during DFO day trip south**
(Anne Craig)



JANUARY 3 New Year's Birding Blitz (numerous Jefferson, Douglas locations)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Amy Manning, Judy McKeon, Lark BenDaniel,
Luke Jaramillo, Susan Barrett, Linda Purcell, Dana Hiatt

Jan. 3 birders scanning at Chatfield SP
(Linda Purcell)

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JANUARY 20

Pueblo area

Leaders

Brandon Percival and David Suddjian

Participants

Ajit and Liza Antony, Archer Silverman,
Judy McKeon, Roger Spaulding,
Linda Cunico, M. Gaylord

Scoping Lake Pueblo on Jan. 20 field trip
(David Suddjian)

JANUARY 21 Boulder County raptor tour

Leader

Donna Stumpp

Participants

Peter Ruprecht, Emily Scheler, Meg Reck,
Debby Miller, John Batt, Michelle Trotter,
Scott Levine, Marirosa Donisi

Two interested bystanders watching
the birdwatchers on DFO Jan. 21 Boulder County trip
(more than 11,000 likes on FB)
(Michelle Trotter)



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JANUARY 23
Littleton

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Joey Kellner, Alice Tariot,
Mary Geder, Leslie Dixon

All binocs at attention during Jan. 23
Littleton field trip
(Joey Kellner)



JANUARY 24
**Northeastern
Colorado**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Gary Witt, Isaac Ho, Ken Stuckey,
Mark Amershek, Winston Liu,
Dana Hiatt

Lower Latham sunset on Jan. 24
Eastern Plains trip
(David Suddjian)

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JANUARY 28
Pueblo Area
(joint DFO / Aiken Audubon)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Tally Kerr

Participants

Melissa Wetzig, Allisa and Cory Linfield, Devin Dowd, Gary Witt, Ben Kmetz, Linda Purcell

Jan. 28 joint trip with Aiken Audubon along
Arkansas River in Pueblo
(Tally Kerr)



JANUARY 31
Aurora Birding
(multiple locations)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Cestkowski, Amy Manning, Julia Gwinn,
Leslie Dixon, Laura Kennedy, Andrea Duran,
Marirosa Donisi, Chloe Smith, Cindi Inklebarger,
Bob Rolland

Lunch break on Jan. 31 field trip to Aurora Reservoir
(Cynthia Cestkowski)



FEBRUARY 4
Lakewood
(Jefferson)

Leaders

Anne Craig and David Suddjian

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Jennifer Randall, Sue Summers,
Rena Fowler, Jonathan and Angela Hebel,
Becky Russell, Dick Prickett

Participants in Feb. 4 Lakewood outing
pose in Cottonwood Park
(Anne Craig)



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FEBRUARY 9
Waterton Canyon
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Joel Stone, Sheri Shimamoto,
Tim Redmond, Tracy Pheneger, Paul Malinowski

Break time during DFO outing Feb., 9
up Waterton Canyon
(David Suddjian)



FEBRUARY 10
Denver City Park

Leader
Helen Butts

Participants
Gary Witt, Jeanne Dillon, Carolyn Burr

Snow-scooping Duck Lake on Feb. 10 trip
to Denver City Park
(Gary Witt)



FEBRUARY 11
Super Duck Sunday

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Paula Rosson, Amy Manning, Brian Huculak,
Virginia Gulakowski, Glenn Jacoby, Jordan Nicholls,
Michelle Trotter, John Batt, Becky Russell, Gigi Zarzuela,
Nicholas Saenz, Brent Gordon

Referee Suddjian (stripes) and his crew scope Clear Creek
during DFO's Super Duck Sunday outing Feb. 11
(David Suddjian)



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FEBRUARY 16
**February Front Range
Counties Blitz**
(Larimer)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Dana Hiatt, John Malenich, Diane Roberts,
Andrea Duran, Ian de la Rosa, Debra and David Strike,
Jane Lee, Luke Jaramillo, Ginny Bergstrom

Larimer County team on Feb. 16, day 1 of DFO's
Front Range Counties Birding Blitz
(David Suddjian)

FEBRUARY 18
**South Platte River Trail /
88th Avenue +vicinity**
(Adams)

Leader
Charlie Chase

Participants
Alice Tariot, Joey Kellner, Michelle Trotter,
Terry Bezouska, Dwight Stuessy, Martha Eubanks,
Sue Summers, Patricia Cullen, Laura Hollenbaugh

The gang from Charlie Chase's Feb. 18 South Platte River
field trip strikes a pose
(Joey Kellner)



FEBRUARY 18
February Front Range Counties Blitz
(Boulder)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Laura Steadman, Benjamin Jacques, John Malenich, John Batt,
Judy McKeon, Julia Auckland, Timothy Condon, Kara Clark,
Christopher Curwen, Courtney Rella

Feeder watching in Allenspark on Feb. 18 Boulder County
leg of Front Range birding series
(David Suddjian)



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FEBRUARY 19
Rosy-Finch ramble
(Park, Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Debby Henkens, Lara Cueni, Linda Cunico, John Batt, Melissa Wetzig, Natalie Uschner-Arroyo, Cindi Inklebarger, Cynthia Breidenbach, Julia Gwinn, Dick Prickett

Rosy-Finch Ramble crew in Como, Park County
on Feb. 19
(David Suddjian)



FEBRUARY 21
Front Range Counties Blitz
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Debra and David Strike, Chip Dawes, Dick Prickett, John Batt, Ginny Bergstrom, Lorna Thomas

An indoor perch for viewing Rosy and Cassin's finches
in Jefferson County Blitz on Feb. 21
(David Suddjian)

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FEBRUARY 23
Front Range Counties Blitz
(Douglas)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Diane Roberts

Participants

Melissa Wetzig, Linda Cunico, Debra Strike, Andrea Duran,
Dick Prickett, Isaac Ho, David Strike, John Batt

Douglas County Birding Blitz crew in Louviers Feb. 23
(David Suddjian)

FEBRUARY 24
Rocky Mountain NP
(Larimer)

Leader

Carly Crow

Participants

Winston Liu, Anne Craig, Lucyna Campo,
Julia Auckland, Jackie Jazo

Snowshoe birders pause at frozen Bierstadt Lake
on Feb. 24 field trip in Rocky Mtn NP
(Carly Crow)



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FEBRUARY 25

Front Range Counties Blitz (El Paso)

Leaders

Jessica Miller and David Suddjian

Participants

Timothy Condon, John Batt, Christopher Keefe,
Sheri Shimamoto, Joel Stone, Scott Hammel,
Andrea Duran

All eyes on waterfowl at Big Johnson Reservoir
on Feb. 25 Blitz trip to El Paso County
(Jessica Miller)

FEBRUARY 29 Rocky Mountain NP (Pueblo)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

John Batt, Fran Rulon-Miller,
Andrea Duran, Greg Mihalik

February Birding Blitz team at day's end
Feb. 29 in Pueblo's Lake Runyon SWA
(David Suddjian)



Welcome to new DFO members

Audrey Anderson, Boulder; Zachary Haag, Springfield; Debby Henkens and Harry Ott, Morrison; Audrey and Andrew Hicks, Littleton; Brittany Jerling and Adam Silver, Denver; Dustin Kohler, Union; Mary and Charles "Chuck" Metzger, Centennial; Kathie Moses and Alan Heusdens, Sedalia; Luke and Tracy Pheneger, Longmont; Kristin Tallis, Fort Collins; Terry Tedford, Castle Rock; Mike Tupper and Naseem Munshi, Lafayette

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Chris Blakeslee, Nate Bond, Karel Buckley, Kevin Corwin, Linda Cunico, Mary Geder, Laurie Gibb, Scott Hammel, Terry and Becca Hammons, Brian Johnson, Roger Koester, Pam Lauman, Jean McClenathen, Luke and Tracy Pheneger, Deb Pirrello, Dick Prickett, M. Beatriz Silveira, MD; Paul Slingsby, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, Julie Thorpe

Friends of DFO

Barb Archer, Kevin Corwin, Linda Cunico, Kathy Hawkins, Tina Peters, Luke and Tracy Pheneger, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, Tom Whitten

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Bev Baker, Nate Bond, Mary Ann Bonnell In Memory of Ann Bonnell, Kevin Corwin, Lee and Linda Farrell, Jane Haddock, Scott Hammel, Kathy Moses and Alan Heusdens, Luke and Tracy Pheneger, Paul Slingsby, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, Bea Weaver





LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

American Dippers: Wee wonders along our winter watercourses

Photos by Anne Craig

Dipper with freshly caught insect
larvae from Bear Creek

Anne Craig

I saw my first American Dipper in the Bear Creek Greenbelt on Nov. 29, 2020. Having seen this enthralling little diver only at Waterton Canyon, I was absolutely thrilled to find one in my own birding patch, which lies within one of the greenbelt's eBird hotspots — [S Kipling Pkwy to S Wadsworth Blvd](#) in Lakewood.

Chalk it up to my being from Florida. I've been in Colorado for only five years. We don't have dippers in Florida. We have alligators. And water moccasins. So when I see a dipper, I can actually crouch down with my camera at the water's edge, prepared to take pictures for a spell without worry. And I have done so, repeatedly, smiling the whole time. I've shot thousands of frames of dippers. Thousands.

Anyone seeing me at this must think I'm nuts. I'm not. I just love these birds! I crack up watching them plunge into the water. Sometimes the current will take one downstream 10 or 15 feet. And sometimes the bird will fly right back to its original mid-stream spot — usually a rock, but maybe the creek bank, or a low branch or snag, or a streamside patch of ice and snow.



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Spending time with American Dippers in my own patch has allowed me, over the past few years, to mark just when they arrive on my stretch of the creek and when they depart. With only a couple of days' variation at either end, they show up in late October and leave in late March. I've also learned that, generally, dippers are solitary foragers. I see only one at a time, though occasionally I see two. I'm pretty sure there aren't more than three along this part of Bear Creek at any one period.

As for the other seven months of the year, I assume the dippers have gone back to breeding spots higher up — probably along Bear Creek, perhaps at Jefferson County's [Lair o' the Bear Park](#) above Idledale, where some of them hang out year-round. Wherever they go, I agree with **John Muir**, who wrote that the American Dipper — or Water-Ouzel, as he knew it — is “the mountain streams' own darling.”

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On a well-used midstream rock between dives



All-weather hunter, perched on icy bank, about to plunge as snowflakes fall



Amidst the torrent, about to dive for underwater morsels



On a drier perch above the Creek

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 40*

How delightful for us down below that dippers like to spend the colder months in the shallow rapids of our Front Range creeks and streams. When I seek them out, I start beneath the Kipling Street bridge over Bear Creek. I don't know quite why, but dippers seem to love hanging out in rushing water under bridges. Walking west, I check the rapids upstream to Kipling Parkway. From time to time I have “[dipped](#)” on seeing dippers on my first pass, only to spot one as I return east. The thrill of that first sighting is the same.

Muir also wrote that “both in winter and summer,” this bird sings — “sweetly, cheerily, independent alike of sunshine and of love, requiring no other inspiration than the stream on which he dwells.” Yet the dippers I see in the greenbelt in fall and winter tend to be more intent on feeding and preening.

At least, that is, until late winter, when they begin again to sing. I've seen and heard it. Standing tall on midstream rocks beneath a bridge, dippers belt out their [long, loud, burbling song](#). Not even the hum of cars passing overhead can drown them out.

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It's a reminder that American Dippers are so . . . buoyant. Indefatigable! And they offer everything I love about birding: the chance to see a bird up close, doing its birdy things, yet such a cooperative, almost cheerful photo subject. What's not to adore about America's only aquatic songbird?

DFO trip leader **Anne Craig** has lived and worked in Florida and Japan. She especially enjoys birding her Bear Creek Greenbelt "patch" with camera in hand. She keeps her bird photographs on her blog [Naturally Jax](#).



Blue-gray in shadow, a Bear Creek dipper contemplates another dive



Another dipper pausing before . . .



. . . closing its protective white eyelid and dipping in



Dark gray when diving, this dipper shows light brown head

Flashes of autumn color accent
American Dipper at work in Bear Creek



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY END-OF-WINTER BIRDING!



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 05 | MAY 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Watch volunteer

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Sagebrush Sparrow
Rob Raker
Bear Creek Lake Park
Jefferson County



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on

many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

Sagebrush Sparrow: Shy steppe-child makes off-season cameos along the Front Range

Patrick O'Driscoll

With 20th-century family roots in Nevada, I made several failed attempts there to checklist Sagebrush Sparrow (*Artemisospiza nevadensis*) before finally spotting my first. It was 8 years ago, off a remote and dusty back road near the geographic center of the state. The bird was perched, of course, atop a fine specimen of its namesake shrub, [Great Basin big sagebrush](#) (*Artemisia tridentata*). In classic style, it flicked its erect tail nervously a few times before dropping back to undercover safety beneath the high-desert semi-greenery.

Here in Colorado, this elegant but furtive species is usually a summer visitor, but only within rural corridors along our state's distant northwest, west and southwest borderlines. Its narrow range map also includes a pinky-finger curl of habitat up into the San Luis Valley.

For some reason, Sagebrush Sparrows seem to be popping up more often of late along the Front Range. In March alone, birders spotted them around greater Denver and Boulder, from JeffCo's Bear Creek Lake Park (as many as three birds there) and Chatfield State Park to Boulder County's Lagerman Reservoir and a suburban Boulder backyard that abuts brushy open space. Someone even reported one on the grounds of a resort lodge in Breckenridge, only the second-ever documented in Summit County (the first was found 30 years ago by longtime Colorado birding authority **Hugh Kingery**.)

Anyway, Sagebrush is my favorite sparrow species, even though I've seen it on only four occasions. There's something about its subtle yet striking plumage in a color palette fit for the Great Basin's sagebrush steppes — soft gray head and iron beak, buff brown wings flecked with black, piercing black eye ringed in white, with white Fu Manchu and partial eyebrow, and a dark tie tack on a pale white breast. At a fleeting glance (which may be as much as you get), Sagebrush Sparrow suggests an animated miniature wearing a Prairie Falcon suit: seriously stylin' for a shy guy that gets around mostly by scurrying (not hopping) from desert shrub to desert shrub.

The one on our cover delighted numerous visitors to Bear Creek Lake Park, where DFO member **Rob Raker**, a frequent photo contributor to our newsletter, captured the image.

Fun fact: The male bird's [song of trills and chips](#) contains elements "fine-tuned," says the Cornell Lab's *All About Birds*, to carry across the Interior West's wind-blown brushlands "without degrading." Fun fact No. 2: Sagebrush Sparrows are "site-tenacious" residents (thanks again, Cornell Lab) of those high-desert steppes, returning year after year to the same "very specific" locations to breed.

Now, if only we could keep the Great Basin's shrinking "sagebrush sea" from burning up in more frequent and larger brushfires that trigger the flame-like spread of cheatgrass, an invasive alien scourge. Sadly, takeover by "cheat" makes even Sagebrush Sparrows lose their site-tenaciousness: They'll abandon cheatgrass-infested nesting grounds.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park



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The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Tuesday, April 30, 2024



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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board directors,
committee chairs,
and other position holders
directly, please contact them
individually via the
[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

A trip northeast to the cranes brings home vivid migration memories

Sharon Tinianow

This spring my husband and I did a road trip to see the Sandhill Cranes around Kearney, NE. Some years ago we drove down to see the cranes in Monte Vista, and we were interested to see how the spring spectacle along Nebraska's Big Bend of the Platte compares.

As the Colorado mountains receded in the rearview mirror, we drove northeast into the Great Plains, the rolling landscape giving way to endless farm fields scattered with huge irrigation rigs on wheels. What a different perspective, up close and on the ground, of those giant quilt-patch circles of green you fly over on the way home to Denver from the East.



As we approached the exit off Interstate 80 for Kearney, we were already seeing cranes foraging in crop fields and flying in small groups. For decades, the town has embraced the annual cycle of bird migration as a key driver of local economic activity. A "Crane Watch Guide" brochure, [available online](#) and from the [Kearney Visitors Bureau](#), helps birders design their visit to suit their interests. Hotels and restaurants are conveniently located and feature friendly service.

We chose to follow a self-guided route outlined in the brochure, driving along farm fields where the cranes spend daylight hours foraging for seeds, kernels and other edible residue in last season's corn stubble. At designated pullouts, we stopped to observe the birds more closely. Their sheer numbers were amazing, as was the chorus of their almost constant vocalizing and occasional interaction.

A few miles east of Kearney, we stopped at the [Rowe Sanctuary](#) and its **Iain Nicolson** Audubon Center. There we learned that most of the birds were still on the Platte River, where they roost in the water at night to evade predation by coyotes. The morning was unseasonably cold, which may have explained why the cranes were still tightly packed together on the river. We hiked a short trail and witnessed the moment when thousands of birds flew up in a mass exodus, calling constantly as they broke into flocks and headed for foraging grounds. The spectacle was astonishing!

Come evening, the spectacular display repeated in reverse. Near sunset, the cranes began to leave the cornfields and return to the river for the night. We were waiting at [Plautz Crane Viewing Site](#), a convenient spot about 2 miles east of Rowe Sanctuary. Its two raised viewing decks make for an unbeatable view. Among the few dozen others there were birders visiting from elsewhere, like us, but also local folks who come out at least a couple of times each year to enjoy the sight. Some arrived early with folding lawn chairs to get comfortable for the moment the flocks dropped back to the river.

As we waited, it was a friendly scene. Veteran crane watchers answered newbies' questions about this natural phenomenon. Others shared stories and advice with one another as the setting sun turned the horizon a brilliant orange. As the color drained

Continued on page 6

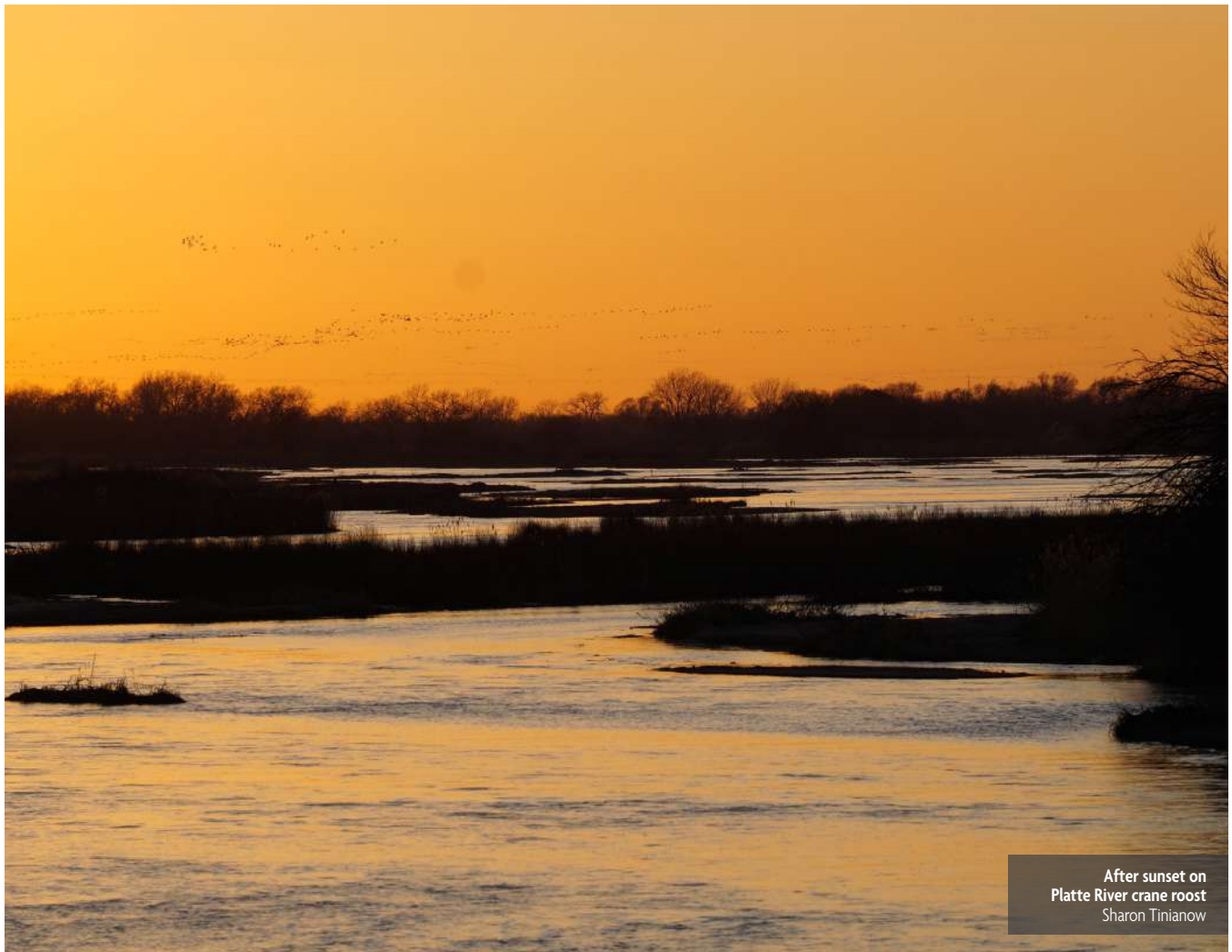
from the sky, the birds began to arrive at their river roost. More and more appeared over the treetops, and they kept coming until nearly dark.

At last, darkness and quiet cloaked the Platte, and we all packed our gear and headed for our own overnight roosts in towns along the interstate.

I am sure you have your own stories about special times when you witnessed the wonders of bird migration. I invite you to share them — in words, pictures and memories — in the digital pages of this newsletter. Your stories are welcome! Contact our newsletter editor, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, at patodrisk@gmail.com to learn how. In the meantime, I hope this season brings you new opportunities to enjoy birds and birding here in Colorado and wherever your travels take you.

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



After sunset on
Platte River crane roost
Sharon Tinianow

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

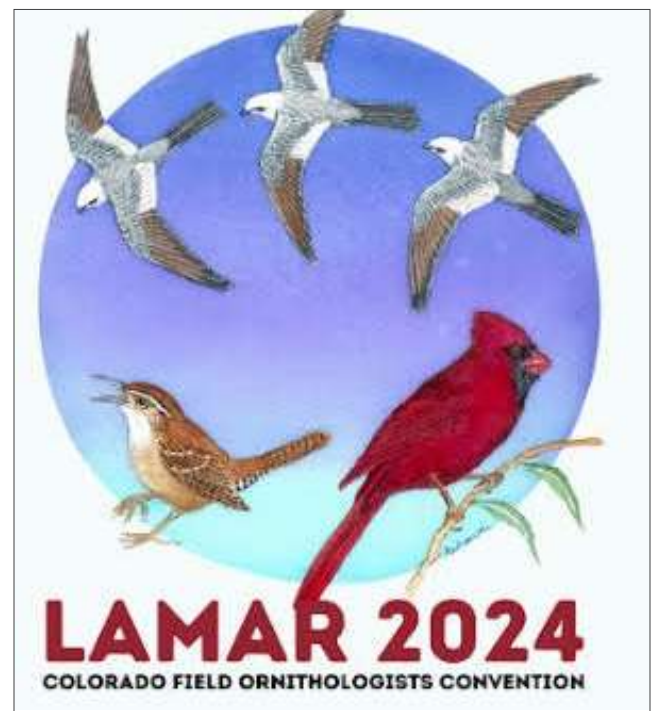


“SPRING INTO WARBLERS 2” IS NEXT BIRD BOMBS MAY 9

Register [here](#) for the next **BIRD BOMBS: Spring into Warblers 2**, set for **Thursday, May 9** at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom with DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian**. The “2” part is because DFO’s very first BIRD BOMBS mini-webinar, back in 2022, was also named “Spring into Warblers” and focused on ID’ing several common warbler species found in Colorado. This time, it’s a new look at the identification of Colorado’s nesting warblers, just as they return. Forty-seven kinds of warblers have been recorded within the state, but fewer species regularly visit and still fewer breed, hatch and fledge their young here. While waiting for this next (and 26th) chapter in the BIRD BOMBS series, check out video of the other 25 in DFO’s [BIRD BOMBS library](#) on the DFO website. Still timely as spring deepens are episodes on Colorado’s [Spring Swallows](#), the [Colorado Blues](#) session on the bluebirds that visit the state, and the most recent April 4 episode, [Spring Shorebird Salute](#).

CFO CONVENTION REGISTRATION CLOSES APRIL 15

It’s last call to register for Colorado Field Ornithologists’ annual convention **May 2-5**, being held this year in Lamar, southeastern Colorado’s spring migration hub. The convention falls on perhaps the single best weekend of the season for birding in that part of the state. Although late registration is available for 10 more days after the **Monday, April 15** deadline, it will cost twice what a CFO member full-registration costs before then — \$280, another \$100 above the \$180 cost for non-members. The convention headquarters is Lamar’s Cow Palace Inn, where a Friday night social and Saturday’s traditional banquet will take place. Before, during and after, numerous half- and full-day outings are scheduled across the region to birding-rich hotspots in canyons, reservoirs, and even inside private ranches. For registration information, visit the CFO website’s convention page at <https://cobirds.org/current-convention/>.



OPEN HOUSE APRIL 16 ON TABOR LAKE TRAIL PLAN

The City of Wheat Ridge wants to build a 10-foot-wide, wheelchair-accessible concrete trail around part of Tabor Lake in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, a popular location for

Continued on page 8

birders. To gauge public interest, the city plans an open House on **Tuesday, April 16** at 4:30 p.m. in the Wheat Ridge Recreation Center, 4005 Kipling St. The path would be open to both pedestrian and bicycle traffic. On the west side of the lake, a “soft surface” section of trail would be only for pedestrian traffic and would be accessible to disabled people. The south side of the lake already has the existing greenbelt hiking and biking trail in place. For more details about the proposed trail, visit <https://rootedinfun.com/365/Tabor-Lake-Trail-Project-2022-2025>.



DENVER AUDUBON'S BIRDATHON SET FOR MAY

Teams of friends, family, co-workers and more will collect pledges from donors in Denver Audubon's annual [Birdathon](#) fundraiser in May. Participants, including individuals, choose a single date in the month to record as many species as they can within a 24-hour period, collecting per-species money pledges from supporters. Proceeds of the event go to Denver Audubon's various conservation, school, bird-banding and family programs. New and existing Birdathon teams can register at the [Birdathon website's "team form" page](#). Individuals who don't have a team but want to join one can do so via email at info@denveraudubon.org or by phone at 303-973-9530.

WYOMING SAGEBRUSH EXPANSE IS “CROWN JEWEL”

The [Sagebrush Sparrow](#) on the cover of this month's newsletter isn't the only thing worth singing about from the Great Basin, the vast interior steppe lands of the American West. National Audubon celebrates what was once the largest ecosystem in America — the sagebrush steppe — with a [five-part multimedia presentation online](#). It focuses on what Audubon calls the “Golden Triangle,” a 574-square-mile patch on western Wyoming that is the sagebrush sea's “crown jewel.” Read and view it at <https://www.audubon.org/content/tour-golden-triangle-crown-jewel-sagebrush-steppe>.

TRACY AVIARY

Lights Out

for birds during peak migration

March through May and August through October **11pm-6am**
WHEN IN NORTH AMERICA

Two thirds of migratory birds travel at night, and light pollution can confuse and draw them off course. TRACY AVIARY encourages everyone to turn off all unnecessary lights. If this is not possible, consider these options:

COLDER BLUISH WHITES	WARMER TONES	SHIELD & MOTION SENSOR	OFF
WORST	BETTER	EVEN BETTER	BEST

Tracy Aviary's Jordan River Nature



Monarch butterfly
Patrick O'Driscoll



Western Painted Turtle
Oregon Fish & Wildlife

FIELD TRIPS

BIRDS PLUS: Enriching some DFO trips with added themes

David Suddjian

As most of us learned soon after we first went out to look at birds, this pastime of ours intersects with so many other fields, subjects and experiences of natural, cultural and human interest. Isn't it time we celebrated this richness?

This year, the Denver Field Ornithologists Field Trips program will introduce Birds Plus, a series of distinctive DFO field trips that combine birding and related fields of focus or activity. Our initial ideas list includes fascinating possibilities: birds plus pollinators, plus geology, plus moths, plus nature illustration, plus photography, plus historical sites, plus nature journaling, plus reptiles and amphibians . . . in other words, plus MORE.

These won't replace DFO's many regular field trips, but they will infuse some outings with new topical possibilities. Sometimes we will invite guest co-leaders to share their knowledge about one or another of these themes.

Look for Birds Plus trips on our Field Trips calendar on the DFO website by this June. We hope these will become a regular feature through the seasons. A team of our trip leaders is coordinating plans for Birds Plus outings this summer and into fall.

We welcome your suggestions and ideas for Birds Plus topics and co-leaders. Please share them with DFO field trip leader **Gigi Zarzuela** at gisellys.zarzuela@gmail.com.

Thank you!

*Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** has led well over 400 DFO outings since 2016. He also created and leads DFO's continuing "BIRD BOMBS" webinar series on bird ID.*

HAWK WATCH

DFO remembers volunteer stricken on Dinosaur Ridge

Patrick O'Driscoll and Mike Fernandez

Denver Field Ornithologists member **Charlie Wall**, an enthusiastic volunteer with DFO's Hawk Watch spring raptor count, suffered a fatal heart attack March 27 while on duty atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. Wall, 69, joined DFO in 2021 with his wife, **Shelley**.

Wall's Hawk Watch teammates summoned emergency aid and attended to him until West Metro fire-rescue teams arrived. Rescuers stabilized and then carried him by stretcher one-third of a mile south along the narrow ridge to an opening where a Flight For Life helicopter could land. He was then airlifted to St. Anthony's Hospital in Lakewood, where he died a short time later with his wife at his side.

"The Hawk Watch family is heartbroken," DFO Hawk Watch chair **Janet Peters** wrote in a message to program volunteers and supporters. "Charlie loved the hawk watch, and he was enjoying his passion for raptors on the day he left us." She recalled that after seeing his first-ever American Goshawk from the ridge earlier this season, Wall told fellow volunteers that their efforts reminded him of fishing: "A lot of waiting and then you spot something that makes it all worth it."

DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** extended "the DFO community's heartfelt condolences to Charlie's family. Those who knew him best will treasure the memory of times spent with Charlie in the field, and the delight he took in our shared love of birds."

Wall was on his sixth visit to the ridgetop observation post this Hawk Watch season, which began March 1. With scopes and binoculars, teams of counters climb the trail daily through the first week of May to spot and tally migrating hawks, eagles and other birds of prey for local and national ornithological databases.

A CU Boulder graduate, Wall was a retired molecular biologist and lab manager at CU's Gates Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Biology. An avid fisherman and outdoorsman, he climbed many of Colorado's 14'ers and also loved rocks and geology.

The year Charlie and Shelley joined DFO, they also joined the Tuesday Birders weekly meetup group. "They both were pretty new to



Charlie and Shelley Wall
Cynthia Madsen



In undated photo, young Charlie with juvenile robin he rescued and cared for
Courtesy of Wall Family

Continued on page 11



Flight For Life helicopter that airlifted Charlie Wall to hospital
Mike Fernandez

birding,” recalled co-leader and DFO member **Cynthia Madsen**, “but I was so impressed with how quickly Charlie took to it and what an awesome spotter he was.” At his passing, Wall had already been on more than 60 Tuesday Birders outings.

Madsen said DFO and Tuesday Birders member **Betty Glass**, the Walls’ neighbor in Littleton, “told me that Charlie was thrilled to be a part of Hawk Watch because he loved the raptors so much. He was very kind and friendly, and an absolute joy to bird with.”

“Such a warm-hearted, gentle man,” echoed Glass, who bonded with “my dear neighbors” through birding, carpooling to Tuesday Birders with the Walls. “Charlie was so good at spotting owls and raptors, with Shelley right there to take a photo,” she added.

Glass said it was inevitable that Wall would enlist in Hawk Watch. “His first day monitoring he texted me: ‘We saw a Goshawk today! It treated us to a long lazy circling view that went directly overhead’ . . . I was very happy for Charlie but also a bit jealous that he had that close experience. He was in heaven.”

HAWK WATCH

First month of Hawk Watch 2024: Raptor gang’s almost all here

Janet Peters

With the first full month of DFO’s Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch in the books, observers atop the foothills hogback in Jefferson County have charted 14 of the 17 species of northbound raptors normally seen during spring migration along the Front Range.

So far, March 23 was the counting season’s most diverse day for bird-of-prey species, including first-of-year migration sightings of Northern Harrier, Osprey, Turkey Vulture, and Merlin. And on the last day of March, observers registered a new high count for the month of 48 raptors. March ended with a total of 426 raptor sightings.

As to be expected in what is statistically Colorado’s snowiest month, March weather presented challenges. Those included a day of counters slogging up the trail to the observation post through 4-foot snowdrifts. Missouri-born lead counter **Dustin Kohler**, who had never used snowshoes before, joined Hawk Watch Committee chair **Janet Peters** in breaking half a mile of steep trail to the viewing platform after metro Denver’s biggest snowstorm in three years.

Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch is DFO’s principal community science project and Colorado’s only location for the national Hawk Watch effort to track and count migrating hawks, eagles, falcons and other birds of prey. With peak migration just weeks away, take advantage of this opportunity to participate in a scientific raptor migration count by visiting or volunteering.



Heavy snow at Hawk Watch in first month of counting
Janet Peters

Please also consider supporting DFO’s efforts with a donation to our Hawk Watch efforts. You can make contributions directly online at the [“Donate to DFO” page](#) on the club website.

Janet Peters is chair of DFO’s Hawk Watch Committee.

SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

The Lonesome Whip-poor-will: The Untold Story of America's Most Iconic Bird



Jared Del Rosso

Jared Del Rosso
Monday, April 29, 2024
7 p.m. MDT

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

For DFO's April program, cultural sociologist and DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** will explore the largely untold story of his favorite bird, the Whip-poor-will. An almost mystical icon of early American culture, the species figured prominently in the seasonal lives of a largely still agrarian-oriented land.

The Lonesome Whip-poor-will: the Untold Story of America's Most Iconic Bird explores its place in the natural and cultural landscapes of America. The story is not only about the species itself, but also about us and how we understand changing relationships among birds, the natural world, and our own lives.

For centuries, Americans in the eastern US eagerly awaited the return of Eastern Whip-poor-wills to their breeding grounds. The song of the first returning bird meant an end to frost and the true beginning of spring. Local newspapers reported on the arrival of the birds, farmers began to plant frost-sensitive plants, and children knew they could go barefoot outside again. That first song was also said to predict the length of people's lives, grant wishes, cure backaches, and even guarantee wealth.

As ordinary folk listened for the bird, American musicians, poets, and writers made the Whip-poor-will a legend. Country singers transformed the birds into icons of lonesomeness and rural life. Poets and nature writers wondered about the species' strange, menacing name. Horror writers spun Whip-poor-wills into the stuff of nightmares.

But with time, says Del Rosso, something has changed. Since the 1970s, Eastern Whip-poor-will numbers have fallen by more than two-thirds. Fewer Americans encounter them regularly. Birders must work harder to add the species to their yearly checklists. Now the singers wax nostalgic, and naturalists pen eulogies. The birds went from unfamiliar to obscure. Today, they're on the brink of forgotten.

Del Rosso, who teaches at the University of Denver, is writing a book on Whip-poor-wills for New York University Press's "Animals in Context" series. He is also an avid birder and has led trips with Denver Field Ornithologists and the High Line Canal Conservancy. He's especially interested in nightjars (the greater family that includes Whip-poor-wills) and is counting the days until this year's return of nighthawks and poorwills to Colorado. His writing about birds and birding has appeared in this newsletter and on the Center for Humans & Nature's blog. For more on his upcoming book, visit his webpage at lonesomewhippoorwill.com.



Top:
Eastern Whip-poor-will
Tom Murray via Flickr

Bottom:
Poorwills painting by Alexander Wilson
American Ornithology

If you missed it: DFO's March program

Although the DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly lecture programs on the Zoom platform, this March 2024 program video was available only for one week at the presenter's request. That period ended April 2. The following summarizes some highlights of the program.



MARCH 25

Small Mountain Owls of Colorado Scott Rashid

Patrick O'Driscoll

After a previous DFO presentation 7 months ago about the 11 kinds of owls found in northern Colorado, **Scott Rashid**, the state's foremost authority on owls, returned to focus on four small mountain species: Northern Pygmy-Owl, Flammulated Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Boreal Owl. Not coincidentally, they are the subject of his book with the same title: *Small Mountain Owls of Colorado*.

The Estes Park-based author, researcher and bird rehabilitator moved methodically through each species with maps, photos, video and narration. The talk revealed Rashid's deep, three-decades-old grasp of every aspect of these unique creatures: anatomy, diet, habitat, hunting habits, courtship, mating and breeding, nest choice, egg-laying and incubation, rearing and fledging of young, and, for us birders, when and where to look for them. But only look, he cautioned — do not disturb: "I want to impress . . . that the most important thing about all of this is to leave the birds alone. Let them do what they have to. Let the birds live their life."

He sprinkled numerous facts and asides about these four species throughout the talk. How one prefers nesting cavities originally excavated by Northern Flickers. How owls bring an impressive array of songbirds and rodents back to the nest to feed spouse and young: Lincoln's Sparrow, Mountain Chickadee, Green-tailed Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, deer mouse, chipmunk, even Horned Lark, a prairie species. How Flammulated Owls prefer aspen tree cavities because dark blotchy variations in the bark help camouflage their nests from predators.

Rashid has observed owls in and around Rocky Mountain National Park for so long and so closely, he can pinpoint trees in which Saw-

whets, Pygmy-owls and Flammulateds nested in the same individual cavity in three different years. He said saw-whets and pygmy-owls tend to nest near water "because they often capture things bigger than themselves and they get bloodied, so they have to take a bath." He described the food-begging call of Flammulated owlets as the sound of "somebody opening a pop can."

Although he knows owls best, Rashid's work isn't confined to them. He has banded more rosy-finches (5,600) than anyone else in the world and is one of a handful of hummingbird banders in Colorado. He also said he believes the current decline in American Kestrel numbers is due at least in part to rising levels of methane gas, killing off insect species the birds rely on.

For more, Rashid's other books besides *Small Mountain Owls* include *The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study* and *Northern Goshawk, the Gray Ghost: Habits, Habitat, and Rehabilitation*, both published in 2015, and *Exploring the World of the Barn Owl: (An intimate look into their secretive lives)* in 2019.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website's [Past Programs](#) page.

Meet the candidates: Seven members up for officer, board posts in April vote



Mary Geder

The annual April election for Denver Field Ornithologists' officers and board members begins shortly. All DFO members in good standing will receive an email with voting instructions, and balloting via an online app that records the votes independently will run from about April 14 **through April 28**. DFO will announce the results on April 29 at the start of the DFO monthly program meeting that night and publish them in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

To help members who may not know them, here are mini-bios for each of the seven candidates who have volunteered to help lead our organization for the next year. Officers stand for election/re-election annually, and board members serve 3-year terms. The DFO Board of Directors includes at least 10 members, about one-third of whom are elected/re-elected each year in staggered terms to ensure continuity.

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Sharon Tinianow

Sharon is seeking re-election. She was voted president of DFO in 2023 after serving two years as vice president. She also served previously as editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter and as a member of the Conservation Committee. Sharon is retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History and lives in Denver

VICE-PRESIDENT

Currently vacant

If you are interested in volunteering for this position, please contact **Mary Geder**, chair of the DFO Nominations Committee, at mfg5000@live.com

TREASURER

Kathy Holland

Kathy has been treasurer of DFO since November 2021, serving in an interim capacity until her first election in 2022. She joined DFO after retiring in 2017 from a working career that included natural gas marketing and risk analysis, and keeping payroll and financial books for two restaurants. Kathy lives in Centennial

SECRETARY

Nate Bond

Nate was appointed interim secretary in April 2022 and was first elected to the position in April 2023. He took up birding in 2020 during the Covid-19 epidemic and joined DFO a year later. He is now also a field trip leader. A high school chemistry teacher, Nate lives in Denver

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Susan Blansett

Susan is DFO's most recent past president (2021-23). She first joined the board in 2016 and has served as Nominating Committee Chair, interim Conservation chair, and vice president (2019-21). She is also a field trip leader. Susan spent 30 years in the economic development field and now works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council. She lives in Golden

Mike Fernandez

A longtime birder, Mike joined DFO in 2014. He has served as Communications & Outreach chair since 2023, is assistant editor of *The Lark Bunting*, and is a volunteer counter for DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch. A retired communications manager for the US Interior Department, Mike lives in Denver

Patrick O'Driscoll

A retired newspaper journalist and 35-year Denver resident, Pat took up birding in his 50s. He joined DFO in 2014, was elected to the board in 2018 and again in 2021. He became a field trip leader in 2016 and newsletter editor in 2020. In 2023, Pat received one of DFO's first Peregrine Awards for his work on *The Lark Bunting*

Phil Waltz

Phil is DFO's Volunteer coordinator, a newly created position. He has extensive experience managing volunteers. He has worked as a professional engineer and as an interpretive naturalist at a nature center. Most recently, he has worked to help people get better at finding and landing jobs, and to help in setting up and supporting apprenticeships. Besides birding, Littleton residents Phil and his wife Kathy enjoy gardening, cooking, traveling, hiking and camping

Nominations Committee chair **Mary Geder** took up birding in the 1990s and joined DFO in the early 2000s. She previously served as treasurer and on the Finance Committee. Retired and living in Lakewood, she began work as a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist before a 30-year career in the oil and gas field as a contracts administrator and systems analyst

DFO grantee reports: Lifting the shroud of mystery from Colorado's Flammulated Owls

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund are expected to report back to the club membership on their DFO-funded work in any of three ways: A program talk, a field trip, or an article in The Lark Bunting. This is Colorado College graduate **Jack Domeika**'s report to the members on his 2023-funded project, [Estimating the effect of habitat quality on gene flow, gene diversity, and fitness in Flammulated Owls](#). Domeika, who majored in organismal biology and ecology (class of 2023), was a field and research assistant for the college's Gamboa Animal Evolutionary Ecology Lab.*

Jack Domeika

Flammulated owls (*Psilosops flammeolus*) have long been shrouded in mystery. Hard to hear and even harder to see, they were thought to be incredibly rare after they were first formally described in 1852. Thanks to the efforts of local researchers, we have demystified these secretive owls, which occur in Colorado's Front Range. Yet there is still uncertainty about aspects of the species' population dynamics and ranges.

Since 1981, Dr. **Brian Linkhart** of Colorado College has spearheaded Flammulated Owl research on the Front Range. For more than four decades, he has worked with small teams of field assistants to observe and band more than 2,000 owls, more than half of them owlets. From their observations of banded owls, Linkhart and his teams have contributed significantly to our understanding of owl breeding patterns, migration routes, and timing.

However, some lingering questions cannot be addressed by field observation alone. As a part of my undergraduate work at Colorado College, I worked with Dr. **Maybellene Gamboa** to understand owl breeding behavior and adaptive variation using modern molecular tools. Specifically, I sorted through decades of owl blood samples and selected 350 individuals, from whose samples I extracted DNA to generate whole genome sequencing data. The goal of this work was to answer three questions:

- What is the effective population size, or population size as estimated from genetic diversity?
- How much gene flow, or successful breeding, occurs among different study sites?
- Can we find genomic evidence for adaptation to climate and anthropogenic (human-caused environmental change) stressors?

Given that Flammulated Owls are a key indicator species, we need to understand owl population dynamics if we are to adequately assess wildfire and habitat alteration threats to our old-growth pine forests. Although we are still in the data analysis portion of our project, we are optimistic that results from our study will address critical gaps in our understanding of owl breeding behavior.

After completing our analyses of Colorado owl populations, we intend to expand our research into Flammulated Owl breeding behavior and movements throughout the species' range. Specifically, we aim to understand gene flow among populations from the western US to the Rockies, and from British Columbia south to Guatemala.

Since graduating from Colorado College in 2023, I've continued to work closely with Gamboa and Linkhart as I pursue work in ecology. I am also exploring other field ecology research opportunities and developing my ecological "toolkit" in preparation for graduate school.

The Linkhart Lab has continued the Flammulated Owl Research Project into its 44th field season, seeking to uncover more of the species' story. Besides its Flammulated Owl genomics work, the Gamboa Lab is pursuing evolutionary ecology projects that include ongoing research in Song Sparrows in both Colorado and the Channel Islands of California.



Photos left to right: **Jack Domeika**, **Flammulated Owl**, **Flammulated in spotlight with moth in mouth** (Jack Domeika)



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

March DFO trips *In Focus*

As spring approached in March 2024, DFO led 17 field trips. Of those, participants took and shared pictures of “birders birding” on eight of them. If you’re on a DFO trip in April, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best: hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, all eyes on a distant bird, or just a candid moment. We’ll run one from each trip in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out by May 10 or thereabouts.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month — **Tuesday, April 30**. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people*, please, not birds. Thanks!

FEBRUARY 24 Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Rebecca Russell, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Manny Perez, Thomas Geier, Amy Manning,
Cat Phanthamany, Lynn Slaga, Kris Saucke

Birders on Wheat Ridge Greenbelt trip on Feb. 24
(David Suddjian)



MARCH 3 Staunton State Park (Jefferson)

Leader
Wes Donnell

Participants
Anne Craig, Winston Liu, Michael Ferrari,
Jessica Colby, Courtney Rella

**Field trippers on March 3 outing
in Staunton SP focus on**
(Anne Craig)

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MARCH 4
Aurora Birding
(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Deb Durand, Sofia Prado-Irwin,
Amy Manning, Cynthia Cestkowski,
Rosanne Juergens, John Batt

Field trippers glass Quincy Reservoir
in Aurora March 4 on a blustery day
(David Suddjian)

MARCH 12
Littleton
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Virginia Gulakowski, Laurel George, Melody Serra,
Michelle Verostko, Deb Durand, Ryan Corda

Stopping at Dancing Willows Park
on March 12 field trip in Littleton
(Melody Serra)



MARCH 17
Louviers
(Douglas)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Lynn Slaga, Scott Hammel, Timothy Condon,
Ryan Corda, Paula Rosson, Brian Huculak

A ramble around the village of Louviers
in Douglas County on March 17
(Scott Hammel)



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MARCH 21
Ken Caryl Valley Area
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Michelle Verostko, Andrea and Rudy Duran,
Martha Strickland, Rob Worrall, Susan Melton

Group photo from March 21 field trip
in Ken Caryl Valley area
(Rudy Duran)



MARCH 23
**South Platte River,
Littleton**
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Denise Reznicek with David Suddjian

Participants
Mary Ramsey, Phil Waltz, Kathy Cisar,
Pamela Stacey, Jax Short, Tom Casadevall,
Patricia Diluzio, Wesley Hill

Denise Reznicek on her first outing
as a DFO trip leader March 23, on the
South Platte River
(David Suddjian)

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MARCH 23
Prospect Park
(Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, JeffCo)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Nadiyah Watts, Dallas Brnum,
Scott Levine, Julia Auckland, Lynn Slaga,
Tom Geier, Alejandra Doucette-Brayer,
Manny Perez, Cat Phanthamany,
Amy Manning, Patricia Kuzma Sell,
John Featherstone

Group shot March 23 on leader Gigi Zarzuela's
12th month trip in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(John Featherstone)



MARCH 27
Aurora Birding
(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Kathy Johnson, Cynthia Cestkowski,
Linda Purcell, Ryan Corda, Kris Saucke,
Gigi Zarzuela, Holly Sollod

Group photo from March 27
field trip near Quincy Reservoir
(Linda Purcell)

At Chico Basin Ranch, rigid new era begins: Time-restricted birding by appointment only



Mockup of birding info sign to be posted at Chico Basin Ranch gate

Patrick O'Driscoll

After a two-month closure, one of Colorado's premier birding destinations will reopen at the end of April. On Monday, April 29, Chico Basin Ranch — a state-owned, two-county expanse of shortgrass prairie southeast of Colorado Springs — begins the first of two new migration birding seasons, each just five weeks long.

Unlike in past years, birders must register and pay online in advance, via the website of Aiken Audubon, National Audubon's Colorado Springs chapter. The daily fee will be \$15 per person, similar to the previous entry cost when Chico Basin's cattle ranch operator hosted birders year-round. (Registration will be on Aiken's [Chico Basin Ranch page](#), but the online registration system is not yet in place.)

Under new rules set by the Colorado State Land Board, birders still enter through the ranch's iconic rustic archway, which has no gate, locked or otherwise. But a sign to be posted there will inform outsiders of drastically shortened birding seasons (April 29-June 2 and Sept. 2-Oct. 6) and hours (7 a.m.-1 p.m. only), with a QR code for smartphone access to the "Chico Basin Birding" registration page on Aiken Audubon's website.

The new birding timetable at the ranch — which has more than 350 recorded species and hosts perhaps the greatest variety of migrating birds in the state — coincides with seasonal operation of a longtime banding station by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Under a no-fee lease with the land board, Aiken will collect birding fees to cover its costs to run the birding program, including the registration system, portable outhouse rental, insurance and other expenses. It also must split fee revenues with the conservancy.

The land board is strictly limiting birders (no more than 20 a day) and their movements. Besides requiring advance registration and payment for a one-day voucher, the board has severely shrunk the definition of "day" to six hours, ending at midday. Birders can visit only three narrowly prescribed birding locations (all eBird hotspots), all within a 10-minute drive of the ranch entrance. The rest of the 86,000-acre ranch — including three other eBird hotspots — is permanently closed to birding.

Aiken Audubon will accept reservations/registrations up to 7 days in advance but no earlier. Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges**, who is coordinating the re-start of birding at the ranch, said the week-ahead limit was set "to keep people from just jumping on (the website) and grabbing every weekend date. We were concerned about people trying to hog up a lot of dates."

The club is still working out how to handle group reservations while accommodating individuals under the 20-birder maximum. "A group is (up to) 12 people, and you can register them further ahead of time," Hodges explained, "but we haven't quite figured

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This QR code will link to registration page for Chico Basin birding.



Vesper Sparrow at Chico Basin
Patrick O'Driscoll

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 20*

out how far ahead of time.” Aiken also plans to set aside four dates each season for group-only visitation. In past years, DFO’s field trip program has led two or three group outings to Chico Basin a year.

One more group wrinkle: The club is prioritizing outings from the area’s annual [Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival](#) on the third weekend in May. “There will be limited spots available for the public on those days because we’re giving most of the slots to the festival people,” Hodges said. Aiken is one of eight partners and co-sponsors of the annual event.

Asked how the club will police birder comings and goings, Hodges replied, “It will be the honors system like before. What I’m telling people is: Please follow these regulations that have been set by the State Land Board, or there’s a chance that we could lose the lease” — and thus, any further birding access whatsoever to Chico Basin Ranch.

Ticket 1 of 1



TICKET CODE
tc6BQq7

TICKET TYPE
General Admission

ATTENDEE NAME
Linda Hodges

EVENT
Chico Basin Birding
Fri Mar 29, 2024 7:00 AM - 1:00 PM
MDT

Sample birding voucher for Chico Basin entry

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

At the “office” water cooler, solitary solitaires kinda sorta get along

Photos by Anne Craig



Townsend's Solitaire at the
photographer's birdbath with a
Black-capped Chickadee



Townsend's Solitaire going for berries in Bear Creek Greenbelt

Anne Craig

When you think of a Townsend's Solitaire, you probably picture a single bird on a treetop lookout in the foothills, or maybe eating berries alone in a mountain juniper.

"The solitaire is well-named," Front Range birder-author **Ted Floyd** wrote of this singular species in his *Field Guide to Birds of Colorado*. "The birds really don't like each other!"

Indeed, *Myadestes townsendi* has a reputation for strenuously defending its territory from other would-be avian consumers of its personal berry bounty. This behavior is especially on display in the colder months, when Townsend's Solitaires descend from the high country for the fall and winter.

Once down here, individuals of both sexes fiercely guard juniper patches (their winter-long larders) against other birds of all species, including their own. We're lucky enough to see them wherever berries grow, from suburban greenbelts to urban parks. And just like the American Dipper (see *Last Word, Last Look* in [last month's newsletter](#)), Townsend's is a drab, gray bird that somehow still brightens my winter.



Pausing for a drink

Continued on page 24

From October to April, I see small numbers in Jefferson County's Bear Creek Greenbelt, which has both juniper trees and currant bushes. Over the past two years, some of them have even come to drink at the heated birdbath on my back deck, from which the greenbelt is visible. I swear *they* are watching *me*: More than once, I'll have just replenished the bathwater when a solitaire shows for a drink.

Around the water's rim, something approaching sociability sometimes occurs: A Townsend's will suffer the presence of *other birds*! I've seen a solitaire actually join a Northern Flicker there, and put up with smaller songbirds like House Finches and Black-capped Chickadees when they arrive to sit and sip.

This birdbath détente does not apply with all birds. American Robins — Townsend's larger, heftier cousins — will readily drive solitaires off. But I've also witnessed the *pièce de résistance* of familial tolerance when two solitaires shared a momentary drink together at the birdbath.

As northern Colorado owl expert **Scott Rashid** likes to say, "There are no absolutes in nature." And so it goes, even for the Townsend's Solitaire, the most solitary of our western birds.

DFO trip leader **Anne Craig** has lived and worked in Florida and Japan. She especially enjoys birding her "patch" (Bear Creek Greenbelt between Estes and Kipling streets) with camera in hand. She keeps her bird photographs on her blog naturallyjax.com.



Townsend's Solitaire,
in profile, at the bath



Rare pair of Townsend's Solitaires
together at Anne's birdbath



Solitaire sharing birdbath
with a Northern Flicker



Solitaire having a drink
with House Finches





Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY FIRST-OF-SPRING BIRDING!

Townsend's Solitaire noshing on
berries in Bear Creek Greenbelt



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 06 | JUNE 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

BIRDING

DFO bike 'n' birders
take first field trip spin

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Despite a bit of snow,
May means spring birds

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C'mon, people now,
let's get together

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Time to discuss this
newsletter's future

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Prothonotary Warbler
Rob Raker
Tucker Gulch, Golden



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on

many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

Áccent on the -THON: Rarity from East twists our tongues, tickles our fancy

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first time I heard of the Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*), hearing had nothing to do with it. I *read* the bird's name, probably in somebody's CObirds post about a rare spring visitor from the East (US, not Asia). Being brand-new to birding at the time, I had no bird whisperer to instruct me in its correct pronunciation. As a word guy, I wrestled with it by myself out loud: "PRAW-thoh-NOTE-ury? Pro-THUNno-TARY? PROTT-o NOH-o?"

When I finally saw one in person in 2015 (my first and only so far, BTW), pronunciation was beside the point. Standing in the entangled, marshy Eden of the Lamar Community College woods in southeastern Colorado, I was looking at a color-sample definition of "golden." No lemon-yellow here. Yet this sleek, striking creature with gray wings was somehow altogether different from our common Yellow Warbler.

Anyway, we take spring note of this occasional Colorado visitor because you can't say "warbler" without eventually wrestling with "Prothonotary," even here in NOT-its-usual-habitat. As it happens, the one on this month's cover dropped by in that epic spring 2020 fallout season, when the COVID-19 pandemic was just a few weeks old and many more birders were out looking for spring rarities.

Rob Raker, a frequent photographer for our newsletter cover, captured the image on May 12, 2020, in Tucker Gulch, that previously unknown hotspot in Golden, CO that was memorably inundated that year with a profusion of various warblers. (Raker himself saw 17 different kinds there.)

As in most years, we've had a handful of lingering Prothonotary sightings in 2024. Its seldom-seen status probably owes to Colorado's relative lack of "wet forests," as Cornell's *Birds of the World* describes the species' preferred habitat. Something else *BOTW* also mentions is how the bird got its name: Its bright yellow plumage is said to mirror the robes of papal clerks, or prothonotaries, in the Vatican halls of the Roman Catholic Church.

Another fun fact: Cornell says it's "the only eastern wood-warbler that nests in tree cavities," especially those formerly occupied by Downy Woodpeckers. But finding those holes for breeding and wintering is much harder now as conversion of forests in the Southeast to timber and crops has destroyed significant habitat. Worse, the rapid loss of mangroves on South America's northern coasts is eliminating key winter quarters for many Prothonotaries.

Which begets a final, more hopeful fact: People have mounted nest box projects for Prothonotaries throughout their breeding range, like we do for bluebirds here, to rescue species numbers from steep and critical decline — and *that* is one golden opportunity.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park



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Welcome, spring . . . It IS spring now, isn't it?

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
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- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Friday, May 31, 2024



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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and other position holders
directly, please contact them
individually via the
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Lemons to lemonade? If things go sour, DFO resolves to squeeze out the fun

Sharon Tinianow

By its nature, birding is fun, and birding's benefits to us individually are many. When we record what we see and hear via eBird, our forays into the field produce data that scientists use to monitor bird populations and identify species trends that lead to conservation action. What a great collaboration: Something we do for leisure-time fun can end up benefiting the very birds we enjoy finding and recording.

At the same time, the more we learn about birds, the more we encounter the really bad things that threaten them: habitat loss, climate change and window strikes, to name just three of many. In response, we can each resolve to change old behaviors or adopt new ones in our personal lives. We can get involved enough to help preserve birds and their habitats.

I find that same duality of “bad news, good news” and creative problem solving in many aspects of our own organization. When COVID-19 struck four years ago, Denver Field Ornithologists had to shut down field trips and in person program gatherings for a time. Learning how to produce Zoom webinars enabled us to continue learning about birds and birding, even while we couldn't gather in person. The DFO Board developed protocols that allowed us to restart the field trips program as soon as we did.

What seemed like a short-term solution to a pandemic roadblock ended up becoming the new normal for DFO. Now, club programs on the Zoom platform allow more local people to attend. And they enable us to connect with presenters (and with more remote friends and members, too) from well beyond our immediate area. Silver lining? For sure.

Another downside, of course, is that we still miss the social aspect that DFO monthly gatherings had pre-pandemic. A small group of members has been investigating what it would take to start meeting in person again and still get the high quality videos that result from a Zoom webinar. The technology hurdle is a high one, though, and we are still searching for an affordable meeting location that will allow us both to meet in person and to either connect via Zoom or videotape the program for others to view later.

I would also like to pursue another social alternative. What if we were to continue our monthly programs via Zoom, but also to host a few in-person events, mainly social, during the year? We could

empower a team to brainstorm ideas for such get-togethers — call it DFO's “FUN-raising Committee” — for birding-related fun! If you are interested, email me at the address below.

In addition, as your newly re-elected president, I am starting a one-on-one listening campaign to learn what matters most to you about DFO. I'm calling it “100 Cups of Coffee.” I invite you to meet with me over your beverage of choice, either in person or via Zoom, to share your ideas about DFO, both what works and what you think should change.

This needn't take more time than to drink a cup of coffee together — a meet-up, not a meeting. Let's talk DFO over a cuppa Joe! If you're interested, contact me at sharontinianow@gmail.com. I hope to hear from you soon.

— Sharon



DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

PLEASE READ: The future of your DFO newsletter may depend on it

Patrick O'Driscoll

For more than 70 years, *The Lark Bunting* newsletter and its predecessor, *Colorado Bird Notes* (the club was the Colorado Bird Club until 1964), have reported regularly to the Denver Field Ornithologists membership about the goings-on of our club. I have a question for you, its readers: Does this newsletter still serve a purpose or need? Does it matter to you as members?

Before you answer — and I hope you will; more about that below — a bit of history first. Back in the 1960s, DFO's newsletter was just a typewritten calendar of field trips, of the rosters and bird checklists from those trips, and of upcoming events. In the ensuing decades, more content would follow: reviews of evening programs, feature articles about birds, birders and birding, galleries of bird photos, a monthly message from the club president, announcements and other news of our organization.

But seven decades after first snail-mailing mimeographed bulletins to members, this newsletter has long since dropped the tasks for which it was created. Field trip checklists are now published instantly on eBird. Field trip registration and detailed trip descriptions went online some years after the DFO website was created two decades ago. And as for any pressing, urgent or more timely announcements? That's what blast emails, social media and pre-program reminders on Zoom webinars are for.

Lacking the month-to-month role it was created for, has DFO's newsletter outlived its need and purpose?

Even though *The Lark Bunting* went digital years ago, its dated 20th-century, print magazine-style format still remains. For all the colorful photos and topical articles, the PDF you are reading now is — in layout, design and function — an unchanged relic of the 20th century, almost 25 years into the 21st. It was designed to be read page by page, forward or backward. Today, you leaf through it on-screen just like the paper publication that readers once held in their hands.

As a practical matter, most of us now get our information differently. Whether it's vital news about home community, state, nation and the world, or family gossip, school and church bulletins, career field, sports team, hobby or club news — we tap multiple interactive platforms and sources: websites, text, email, online video, podcast, phone, satellite, cable, social media. Yes, “legacy” printed-paper publications and broadcast TV and radio networks/stations are still in the mix, but nowhere near as widely as when *The Lark Bunting* was invented.

Three months ago, I wrote in this space that we would soon begin “brainstorming a new format and role for *The Lark Bunting*,” to reimagine and redesign it for this century, not the last one.

Continued on page 7



Top to bottom:
1953, 1988, 2019, 2024 *The Lark Bunting*

I suggested it might become the kind of email-based newsletter that many other organizations, both public and private, send their members: Full of clickable links, short headlines, pithy blurbs and nice photos, but streamlined for here and now.

What do YOU think? Would a periodical email newsletter serve better? Would you prefer instead for DFO just to tell you whatever club news you need to know whenever you need to know it? Would you read *Lark Bunting* articles in an email if you don't read them now? DO you read them now? Do you skim the headlines, glance at the pictures, and move on? Or do you not bother?

By summer, DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee plans to send each of you a short survey about our newsletter and your relationship with it. Whether you read *The Lark Bunting* regularly, glance at it occasionally, or don't look at all, we value your opinion. Honest answers are vital to help direct our next steps. If the newsletter doesn't matter to you, tell us why. If you love it, tell us how. If you're somewhere in between, tell us what works and what doesn't, or what you'd change.

The Lark Bunting is yours, not ours. But unless you indicate that having a newsletter in whatever form matters to you, we might dispense with revamping this one, pull the plug, and instead change how DFO communicates with members to more immediate, on-demand outreach. That is, only when we need to tell you — or when you want or need to know.

Look for our survey soon. If you have comments or ideas you'd like to share now, drop me a note at patodrisk@gmail.com or call me at 303-885-6955. We need and hope to hear from you. Thanks!

SUPPORT DFO

King Soopers shopper? Help DFO with grocer's Community Reward\$

Patrick O'Driscoll

If you shop regularly — or at all — at King Soopers, you can help earn donations to Denver Field Ornithologists by enrolling in the grocery chain's Community Rewards program.

DFO has registered as a community organization with King Soopers, which means the company will contribute quarterly based on the spending of customers who use their King Soopers Shopper's Cards after linking them to DFO on the company's [Community Rewards](https://www.kingsoopers.com) website.

Once you register for DFO, all you have to do is scan your Sooper Card at checkout and a portion of your purchase amount will go to DFO. If you don't have a Sooper Card account, visit <https://www.kingsoopers.com>, select Sign In, then Create Account.

Like many merchants, King Soopers issues "loyalty cards" to enable customers to use them for digital coupons, in-store discounts and, in this case, as a channel for company charitable contributions to the organization of the customer's choice. The donations are based on customer participation in the program. But they are a contribution by King Soopers at no added cost to shoppers who participate.

King Soopers says the program "makes fundraising easy by donating to local organizations based on the shopping you do every day . . . The more your supporters shop with us, the more money your organization will earn." King Soopers donates based on percentage of spending by organization members and friends at its stores. As Colorado's largest grocery retailer, the Kroeger Family of Companies operates about 120 King Soopers stores in the state.

In the first quarter of 2024, DFO's Community Rewards account with King Soopers totaled more than \$120 in donation funds based on the participation of just 21 households. With the regular patronage of many more participating shoppers from the ranks of DFO and its friends, that figure could increase substantially every time King Soopers delivers its quarterly donations.



DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

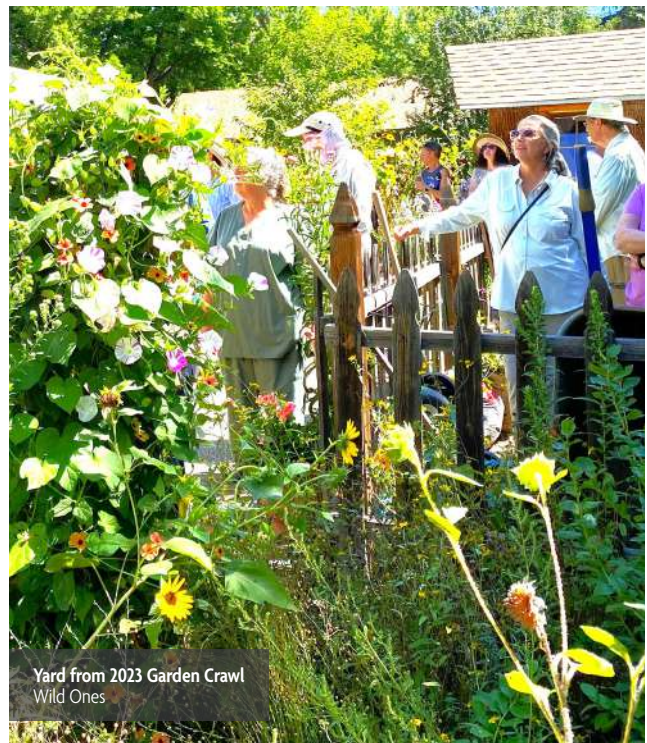
JOIN DFO ON NATIVE PLANT GARDEN "CRAWL" MAY 26



DFO and [Wild Ones Front Range](#), which promotes native plant landscaping, are collaborating for a Denver Garden Crawl the morning of May 26. Registered participants in this free event (8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) will move

as a group through four residential gardens, all in transition from conventional landscaping to native plantscapes. If you've been thinking about incorporating native Colorado wildflowers, grasses and other plantings into your yard, this is a great chance to see what your garden can look like in early summer. You can also ask questions about how each homeowner is converting the yard. Spaces are limited, so visit the [Wild Ones website and register](#) today. Wild Ones has organized the tour, and DFO is a promotional partner. Our club president, **Sharon Tinianow**, will be at one of the gardens to talk about the importance of native plants to the bird species that visit our Front Range yards.

This partnership follows DFO's informative February program, "Gardening on the Wild Side," by **Jim Tolstrup** of [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland. The Zoom video from Tolstrup's presentation is a great introduction to native plants in the landscape and can be viewed on the [Past Programs](#) page of the DFO website. Plans are also underway for a program in the hummingbird-friendly home garden of DFO Board member **Tina Jones** later this summer.



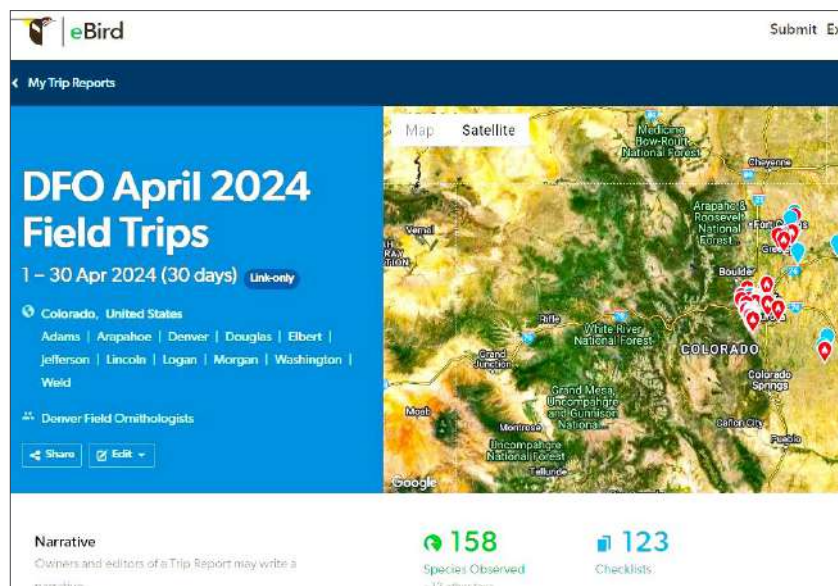
DFO RE-ELECTS OFFICERS, ADDS TO BOARD

After two weeks of online voting for Denver Field Ornithologists' leadership positions, all candidates on the ballot were elected. They include three returning officers and one returning board member, in addition to three new board candidates. Re-elected president for a second one-year term was **Sharon Tinianow**, a former DFO vice president and past editor of DFO's newsletter. Also re-elected to one-year terms were club secretary **Nate Bond** and treasurer **Kathy Holland**. Board member **Patrick O'Driscoll** was re-elected for a third time.

Newly elected board members, who serve three-year terms, include DFO immediate past president **Susan Blansett**, DFO Communications & Outreach chair **Mike Fernandez**, and **Phil Waltz**, DFO's new Volunteer coordinator. Eight other members of the DFO Board were not up for re-election. (About one-third of board seats come open for election each year to ensure continuity.)

Still vacant is the position of vice president, which came open about a month before the election. If you are interested in volunteering for this position, please contact **Mary Geder**, chair of the DFO Nominations Committee, at mfg5000@live.com.

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APRIL FIELD TRIPS REPORT: 23 OUTINGS, 11 COUNTIES

The start of spring migration in April was reflected in an uptick in DFO trips for the month. Eighteen DFO trip leaders led 23 outings, on which 158 species were reported. All told, 123 eBird checklists were submitted from 11 Colorado counties, an average of more than 5 checklists per trip. Check out the complete April field trip rundown on this eBird trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/220875>. And get in on the action in May! Here's DFO's calendar of upcoming spring trips, free and open to all: <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>

BIRD BOMBS FOR JUNE: TROPICAL COLOR

Mark your calendar for the next **BIRD BOMBS: Tropical Color**, set for **Thursday, June 20** at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom with DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** talking about ID of tanagers, grosbeaks and buntings. While waiting for this next (and 27th) chapter in the BIRD BOMBS series, check out videos of the other 26 in DFO's [BIRD BOMBS library](#) on the DFO website.

CLICK TO REGISTER

CO-BIRDERS CROWDSOURCE STATE "YARDBIRD" LIST

It began as an online question the morning of March 11 from Boulder birder and "pretty obsessive yard lister" **Thomas Heinrich** to fellow readers of Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Birds [[cobirds](#)] list-serv: With all the great bird sightings posted there, how many of the state's 520 official-record species have ever or also been reported from that place we assume would be least likely to host a rarity — our own yard? Answering with his own yard list, Heinrich also noted a few recent examples from around the state: "Yellow Grosbeak, Pyrrhuloxia, Streak-backed Oriole, Long-billed Thrasher, Costa's Hummingbird, Laurence's Goldfinch, and even Anhinga come to mind as rarities that have shown up in or been observed from yards."

His "*Yard list questions: How many of CO's 520 species*" post was instant catnip. The email thread quickly filled with entertaining crowdsource answers from dozens of other birders listing favorites, rarities, and personal stories of Colorado yard birding. Heinrich began an Excel spreadsheet with their lists, and by the next morning, the combined tally was 234 species. Another day later, it was 323. Then birder-meteorologist **Bryan Guarente**, who regularly posts migratory bird weather predictions on [[cobirds](#)], offered to merge Heinrich's list with a shared [Google Sheets checklist](#) that everyone could access online.

Barely a month later, Heinrich's update on April 19 showed the list had reached the 400-species milestone (77% of bird species ever seen in the state), thanks to more than 100 contributors from 30 of Colorado's counties. The spreadsheet's three lists include yardbirds in taxonomical order (where new species are added), alphabetical order, and a "needs" list of state-record species not yet reported from a yard. Heinrich stresses that the database does not substitute for or supersede the official Colorado state bird list. Rather, it's a fun, communal effort that "highlights the incredible diversity of yard habitats in Colorado, our remarkable breadth of coverage of Colorado's avian species, and the value of birding in the ultimate of local patches, our yards."

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's April program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the WATCH ONLINE link below to view the recording.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website's [Past Programs](#) page.

APRIL 29

The Lonesome Whip-poor-will: The Untold Story of America's Most Iconic Bird

Jared Del Rosso

WATCH ONLINE

In DFO's final evening program before our summer break, DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, a University of Denver sociology professor, delves into his favorite bird family, the nightjars. He focuses first on the Eastern Whip-poor-will, a bird with an amazing natural, cultural and mythological history in the life and beliefs of America from colonial times. A self-taught scholar of the species, Del Rosso structures his engaging, hour-long talk to tell three rich stories: the many words we use for whip-poor-wills' camouflaged appearance and mystical behavior (including “goatsucker” for an ancient and false myth), their place in our natural and social lore from **Aristotle** to *Sleepy Hollow* to **Stephen King**, and climate and development threats that have led to their decline. Although the Eastern Whip-poor-will is just one of eight nightjar species in the US, Del Rosso notes that five have been documented in Colorado, including the familiar Common Poorwill and Common Nighthawk. His presentation includes fascinating video of largely ground-dwelling poorwills fending off threats, and astonishing audio of a whip-poor-will's loud, mechanical and jarring nighttime call. It's an other-worldly sound that gives the family its “nightjar” name. Click the link and prepare to be amazed.



Three of eight poorwill family species are in Colorado



Jared Del Rosso

Pedal pushers unite! DFO's first "Bike + Bird" field trip won't be last

Nate Bond

In mid-April, Denver Field Ornithologists staged its first-ever "Birding by Bike" field trip along the South Platte River. Early on April 13, five of us (myself, **Linda Purcell**, **Ryan Corda**, **Steven Smith** and **Eileen Warner**) met at Overland Park in south-central Denver to bird one of the river's best stretches of in-town habitat. Then we set off upstream on a 12-mile ride out and back on the South Platte River Trail.

We bookended our route with hour-long visits to two eBird hotspots — the Overland Park area on the north end and Arapahoe County's Centennial Park on the south — plus another hour at a hotspot in between, Denver's Grant Frontier Park. Along the way, we made several non-hotspot stops to view and checklist some of our 47 total species for the day. This birding *while* biking led us to fantastic and unexpected views of a Wilson's Snipe along the Englewood part of the trail and a very early Solitary Sandpiper at the Centennial Park end.

To me, that's one of the best features about birding by bike: When you see or hear something en route, whether a specific bird or promising habitat, you can pull over (safely, of course) to check it out. Birding on two wheels works well in Denver, a city with a growing number of bike lanes and various bike paths to explore.

Seeing under-birded places you may miss going past by car is what excites me. Which also reminds me: Having a kickstand on your bike is especially helpful. Stopping frequently for birds is so much easier when not having to balance your bike while looking.

Why bird by bike to begin with? It's a great way to have an immersive birding experience — feeling you're surrounded by bird habitat as you go, and leaving the car behind. You're birding in a "greener" way, not adding to the carbon footprint by burning fossil fuel to get from place to place. In our case, three out of the five rode their bikes to the starting point and home again afterwards, an even better carbon savings.



It's likely we'll have more DFO "Birding by Bike" trips in the future. If you want to participate, have questions, or want to share ideas for future bird + bike trips, contact me at nnbond22@gmail.com.

*Field trip leader **Nate Bond** is secretary of DFO. He joined the club in 2021, a year after taking up birding during the Covid-19 epidemic. A high school chemistry teacher, Nate lives in Denver.*

Nate Bond, foreground, and participants of DFO's first bicycling + birding field trip
Nate Bond

DFO grant fund awardees for 2024: Shrikes, chickadees, bird rehab and more

Jill Boice

Thanks to the generosity of Denver Field Ornithologists members and other donors, six grant applicants are receiving a combined \$9,888 in financial aid this year from DFO's [Research, Conservation & Education Fund](#). The winning endeavors were chosen from 11 very interesting applications reviewed by the DFO Grants Committee and approved in February by the DFO Board of Directors.

This marks the sixth consecutive year that our club has granted a record dollar amount to research, education, interpretation and support projects in Colorado and about its avian inhabitants. The committee evaluated the grant winners based on how well their projects match DFO's goal to "encourage the study, appreciation and preservation both of birds and their habitats."

Here are summaries of the grantees' projects by title, applicant, and dollar amount. Each is expected to report back to DFO and its membership next year about the status of the work.



Nicole Addison with
Mountain Chickadee
CU Boulder

"Investigating Anti-predator Defenses in Chickadees Along the Rocky Mountain Front Range"

Nicole Addison, *University of Colorado Boulder* / \$2,000

Addison's research seeks to document real-time predations on Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Mountain Chickadees (*Poecile gambeli*) at different elevations on Colorado's Front Range. In particular, she will study when individual birds are trapped inside a nesting cavity by an intruder. Chickadee defense responses include hissing, wing-slapping and protruding their heads. She plans to install about 13 movable video cameras in existing nest boxes of the university's continuing Boulder Chickadee Study. The research aims to evaluate predator-prey interactions and better understand how predators influence bird behavior. Some of the nest-camera videos will even be streamed online for community viewing. Yes, DFO members can follow directly in the field a project that their grant dollars support.



William Anderson
CU Boulder

"Comprehensive Transect Sampling of the North American House Wren Hybrid Zone"

William Anderson, *University of Colorado Boulder* / \$1,850

Previous work by Anderson and colleagues examined the genetic differentiation of two subspecies of House Wren common in the US: *Troglodytes aedon aedon* in the East and *Troglodytes aedon parkmanii* in the West. They found both subspecies present in Colorado, indicating that the hybrid zone between the two is significantly farther west than previously thought. This project is sampling wrens along Colorado's Front Range to develop a more complete understanding of the contact zone and hybridization between these subspecies. "The potential results have much to teach us about avian hybrid zones, species boundaries and genetic divergence," Colorado bird sound expert **Nathan Pieplow** wrote in a letter of recommendation for this project.

Continued on page 13



“Genoscape and Migratory Connectivity of the Loggerhead Shrike”

Holden Fox, *Colorado State University* / \$2,000

Fox is conducting a comprehensive genetic analysis of migratory patterns in the Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), a grassland species experiencing significant range-wide population declines. His project goal is to create a map of genetic variation to be used in targeted and region-specific management and conservation. Shrikes have intricate and varied migration patterns. Some are fully migratory, others are partially migratory, and still others remain year-round residents. Fox plans to sample birds in Colorado, Nevada, Oregon and Washington and use some samples from the museum collection at CSU.



“Purchase of Species-specific Foods and Medical Supplies”

Matthew Celesta, *Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center*, Boulder / \$2,000

This 41-year-old organization near Longmont, CO takes in injured and ill birds from along the Front Range. In that time, it has cared for more than 200 different avian species. This grant is paying for highly specialized medical supplies and special foods that help center caretakers feed and nurse their bird patients. “Having additional funding allows us to offer each patient the most comprehensive care we can provide,” Celesta wrote.



“Updated Signage”

Erin La Count, *Friends of Dinosaur Ridge*, Morrison, CO / \$1,052

This nonprofit manages the fossils and natural resources in and around Dinosaur Ridge, the famed hogback geological formation on the edge of the Front Range foothills in Jefferson County. In their long-standing relationship with Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch (now a DFO community science project with spring raptor counting from a ridgetop observation post), Friends plans to replace and update older interpretive signs about Hawk Watch for visitors to the ridge’s east side main visitor center and west side Discovery Center.



“Presentations About Wildlife in Jefferson County Schools”

Devin Jaffe, *Nature's Educators*, Florence, CO / \$986

Nature's Educators keeps and cares for non-releasable and captive-bred birds and other wildlife for use in educational programs and public forums throughout Colorado. Grant funding will support raptor programs in Jefferson County schools and coordinate activities with DFO's Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge. Nature's Educators has presented at DFO functions and has a longstanding relationship with DFO.

Jill Boice, who joined DFO in 2001, chairs the club's Grants Committee and leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

April DFO trips *In Focus*

With spring migration underway in April 2024, DFO led 23 field trips. Of those, participants took and shared pictures of “birders birding” on 11 of them. If you’re on a DFO trip in May, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best: hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, all eyes on a distant bird, or just a candid moment. We’ll run one from each trip in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out by the end of the first week in June or thereabouts.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month — **Friday, May 31**. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people*, please, not birds. Thanks!

APRIL 3

Southwestern Metro Area

(Jefferson County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Gigi Zarzuela, Diane Sanelli, Tim Redmond, Mike Ley, Scott Hammel, Katherine Peterson, Courtney Rella

Field trippers pause at Mann Reservoir in South Valley Park on April 3 trip in SW metro area
(David Suddjian)



APRIL 5

Colorado Eastern Prairie

(Elbert, Lincoln)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Melissa Wetzig, Kenneth Stuckey, Courtney Rella, Luke and Sara Jaramillo, Linda Cunico, Gary Witt, Roger Spaulding, Judy McKeon, Lorna Thomas

Eastern prairie field trip April 5 birded country around the tiny town of Karval
(David Suddjian)

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APRIL 8

Northeastern Colorado (Weld, Morgan, Washington, Logan)

Leader

David Suddjian and Diane Roberts

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Debra and David Strike,
Melissa Wetzig, Luke and Sara Jaramillo, Robert
and Jennifer Tonge, Andrea Duran, Scott Hammel

Scoping for prairie chickens April 8 in
Washington County on NE Colorado field trip
(David Suddjian)

APRIL 13

Dinosaur Ridge (Jefferson)

Leader

Ajit Antony

Participants

Jeff Dawson, Laura Koepnick,
Amy Manning, Derek Freed, Liza Antony,
Eileen Holcomb, Deb Piranian

Looking for raptors on April 13 field trip atop
Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County
(Eileen Holcomb)



APRIL 13

South Platte Birding + Biking (Denver, Arapahoe)

Leader

Nate Bond

Participants

Ryan Corda, Linda Purcell, Stephen Smith, Eileen Warner

Participants in DFO's first bicycling + birding field trip
April 13 along South Platte River in Denver
(Nate Bond)



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APRIL 14
Roxborough Area
(Douglas, Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Alice Tariot, Virginia Gulakowski,
Shay Lyons, John Batt, Michelle Verostko,
Gigi Zarzuela, Linda Klumpers

Field trippers scoping South Platte Canyon Reservoir
April 14 on Roxborough area field trip
(Gigi Zarzuela)



APRIL 21
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Adams)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Kathy Cisar, Phil Waltz, Virginia Gulakowski,
Lynn Slaga, Joe Chen, Ryan Corda,
Linda Klumpers, Colleen Nunn

Bundled up and scanning Lake Ladora at Rocky Mountain
Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge on April 21 field trip
(Jason B. Bidgood)



APRIL 22
Cherry Creek SP
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Mary Keithler

Participants
Rachael Falgout, Patricia Diluzio, Cynthia Breidenbach,
Amy Manning, Kris Saucke, Patricia Cullen, Julia Gwinn,
Lorna Thomas, Joe Chen

Mary Keithler, front right, leads April 22 field trip
at Cherry Creek State Park
(Joe Chen)



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APRIL 25

Red Rocks Park (Jefferson)

Leader

Nate Bond

Participants

Bridget Sanders, Joe Chen, Yvonne Berg,
Sharon Tinianow, Michelle Verostko, Becky Russell

Climbing trail amid sandstone giants on April 25
DFO field trip in Red Rocks Park
(Joe Chen)

APRIL 28

Tamarack Ranch SWA (Logan)

Leaders

Carly Crow and Ben Jacques

Participants

Courtney Rella, Julie Hendricksen, Archer Silverman,
Timothy Condon, Kristin Tallis, Ryan Corda, Michelle Trotter,
Lynn Dierker, Adriana Jacobi, Brad Tallis

Carly Crow demonstrates bird radio-tracking during
DFO trip April 27 to Tamarack Ranch State Wildlife Area
(Courtney Rella)



APRIL 29

Ponderosa Preserve (Aurora)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Cestkowski, Ryan Corda, Rachael Falgout,
Michelle Trotter, Oliver Urdiales, Joe Chen, Luke Jaramillo,
Lori Morton, Deborah Hebblewhite

Birding amidst the ponderosas of Ponderosa Preserve
in Aurora on April 29 field trip
(David Suddjian)



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Welcome, spring . . . It IS spring now, isn't it?

Photos by James Esten



White-crowned Sparrows in spring snow



Mountain Bluebird on a frosted perch

Patrick O'Driscoll

As I write this, scores of our birding friends and acquaintances are ranging all over southeastern Colorado in pursuit of spring migrants and other avian delights during this year's Colorado Field Ornithologists convention in Lamar.

But as our state hits its traditional peak weeks of spring migration, I wonder: Is it just me, or has this been an uncommonly unsettled spring of chilly, blustery weather?

I asked newsletter photo editor **Jim Esten** if he'd go out and gather up a gallery of birds in springtime movement for this month's "Last Word, Last Look" feature — some seasonal scenes to go with that rare but regular spring visitor on our cover, the Prothonotary Warbler.

When the nice shots that Jim brought back included a several with snow in them, I did a doubletake, then nodded in recognition. Spring may be here, but sometimes it wears a mantle of white, even if it's gone within a day, two tops.

Snow or no snow, here's to a great last few weeks of spring migration. Welcome, warblers, tanagers, shorebirds, sparrows, our namesake Lark Buntings and all the rest!



Great Blue Heron trio at Chatfield SP

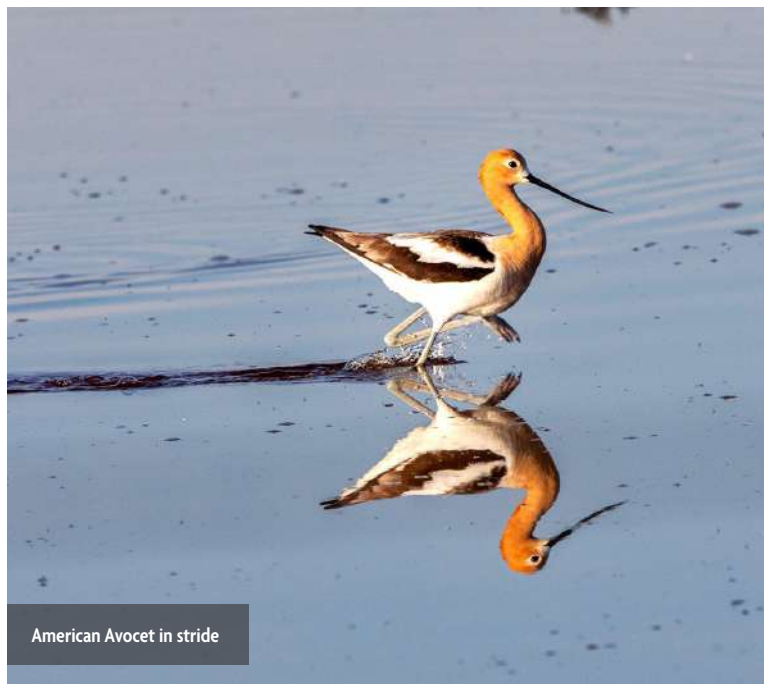
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Yellow variant House Finch



American Robin tugging out an earthworm



American Avocet in stride



A solitary American White Pelican

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**HAPPY END-OF-SPRING
BIRDING!**



Top: Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)
Bottom: Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 07-08 | JULY-AUGUST 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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bags last 4 CO counties

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



American Kestrels
Dave Prentice
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
Adams County



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder/photographer for the past 10 years.

A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the product design field.

ON THE COVER

American Kestrel: Our smallest, and closest, falcon

Patrick O'Driscoll

We all love the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), don't we? What's not to like about a colorful, even gregarious species that is, as Cornell's *Birds of the World* notes, "the smallest, most numerous, and most widespread North American falcon"? Who hasn't been mesmerized at the sight of one hovering in midair over open ground, face to the breeze and laser-focused on insect, reptile or small rodent prey below?

And how about those snappy, distinctive outfits they're wearing on the cover of this month's newsletter? Same palette but different strokes — his blue-gray wings and rufous tail, her streaked breast and black-bars-over-rufous wings. DFO member **Dave Prentice** of Denver saw this mated pair in March near the visitor center in Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge while on a Tuesday Birders outing. (*When you're done here, flip to the newsletter's back page for another, au naturel view of this same pair.*)

Of the world's 13 kestrel species, it's the only one in our hemisphere (though there are 17 subspecies variations of American Kestrel from the tip of South America to Alaska). A creature of mostly open plains and grasslands, the American Kestrel seems attracted to the landscapes that humans have bent to our own needs, like farmland, parks, even our own yards. (It may have been little birds at my backyard feeder that brought a pair briefly into my yard and alley last year in the thick of urban east-central Denver.)

If you don't see them as often as you used to (that's been my experience), there are alarming studies of late that say North American has lost an estimated 2 million American Kestrels since 1970 — and that their numbers are dropping by 1.4% a year. A recent New Mexico study suggested the "steady and widespread downward trend" may portend a need to list the species under Endangered Species Act protection unless we act.

And yet, no one can quite place a finger on how and why kestrels may be declining, beyond the "usual suspects": habitat loss, less available prey, and the suspicion that climate change is at play. The species still merits a "Least Concern" rating from BirdLife International, principally for its widespread range — essentially the entire Western Hemisphere. Yet the wildlife action plans of more than 20 states flag American Kestrel as a species of concern.

Purely anecdotally, it's interesting to note that American Kestrels outnumbered every other raptor and bird of prey species this spring at DFO's own Hawk Watch observation post atop Dinosaur Ridge. Between March 1 and May 10, our team of counters and volunteers tallied 501 of the little falcons, well ahead of Red-tailed Hawk (463), Turkey Vulture (394) and Cooper's Hawk (231) among the half-dozen species whose tallies reached at least triple digits (100 or more).

Once known as Sparrow Hawk (hence its Latin scientific name *sparverius*, "sparrow-like"), it nests in cavities (often former homes of woodpeckers) but has adapted well to artificial nestboxes placed by humans eager to have the species close by. Who can blame us?

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park.



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The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Sunday, July 31, 2024





**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Sharon Tinianow

Vice President

(vacant)

Secretary

Nathan Bond

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Kathy Holland

Past President

Susan Blansett

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Better Birding Skills

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Jim Esten (admin@dfobirds.org)

Zoom Coordinator

Jim Esten (admin@dfobirds.org)

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

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Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

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To reach DFO officers,
board directors,
committee chairs,
and other position holders
directly, please contact them
individually via the
[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Books on birds: A DFO veteran's trove will soon be available to you

Sharon Tinianow

In this age of so many online and portable, pocketable, smartphone birding guides and apps — eBird, Merlin, Sibley Birds, iBird, BirdsEye, iNaturalist, the list goes on — bird-related books printed on actual paper seem rather passé. That first set of field guides that started you on your birding adventure . . . those gifts of desk references, birder memoirs and coffee table photo volumes . . . all those birding pamphlets picked up on the road. Are they gathering dust on your avian bookshelf?

That was certainly so for **Barry Knapp**, a member of DFO for 40 years. After collecting and reading dozens of bird-related books over the years, Barry recently offered his collection to DFO. Sell them for the club cause, he suggested, so that his beloved volumes, some of them quite rare, might live on in the hands and hearts of other birders who will appreciate them.

"I was never a '5-star' birder, chasing every new North American record, or even every new Colorado record," Knapp wrote in a recent email. He never tried to master all the gull plumages, either. (Nor have I! Have you?) But he liked to read, and his collection of bird books includes some real gems.

And let's face it: While a digital field guide is certainly handier, paging through a bound book with beautiful bird images and interesting text is still a delightful way to spend some time.

Barry began acquiring his bird library before his move to Colorado in 1971. He became a compiler for the Christmas Bird Count in the late '70s and early '80s, and he came to know Boulder's birding community through those efforts. One of his Christmas count feeder watchers was **Pat Wheat**, and after her passing, Wheat's husband gave Barry her collection of bird books, and his library grew.

Since receiving Barry's gift, DFO has been working with a local author and publisher to assess the value of his collection of books, vinyl records of bird song, Audubon bird prints, and prints of scientific papers. It's a necessary first step in deciding how best to make them available to birders. Setting aside

the non-books for now, we sorted Barry's volumes into two stacks: Those readily obtainable from sellers of used books, and those rare or hard-to-find.

Those in our easy-to-obtain box will be made available, each for a nominal donation, at in-person DFO events in the coming months. We plan to make the rare/hard-to-find books available for sale on eBay **beginning June 15**. Readers of *The Lark Bunting* can see the list of books in advance at [this link on the DFO website](https://www.dfo.org/links/2024/06/15/eBay-sale/). The sale will continue until they're all sold. We will not promote the sale to those beyond the readers of this newsletter until July 15.

To participate, go to this page on the seller's eBay sales site ("thegreatbe65"): https://www.ebay.com/sch/267/i.html?item=166829002759&_ssn=thegreatbe65. If you have an eBay account or a Google account you can sign in with that. If you don't have either, you might want to create an eBay account so you will be ready to purchase when you reach the sale site.

Our eBay booklist includes 30 volumes, all but six of which are bird-related. Of special interest to Colorado birders is the seminal two-volume publication *Birds of Colorado* by 20th-century naturalists and friends of DFO **Alfred M. Bailey** and **Robert J. Neidrach** when they worked for the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science). Neidrach and his ornithology students were among our club's founders in the 1930s. Paging through these volumes with their full-color plates and black-and-white photos is a delight.

Other oversized titles include *Birds of America*, featuring the paintings of **Louis Agassiz Fuertes**, *Collins British Birds* illustrated with the paintings of **Terence Lambert**, and *The World of Birds*, magnificently illustrated by **Roger Tory Peterson**.

The collection also includes delightful smaller books, including *The Tanagers: Natural History, Distribution, and Identification*

Continued on page 6



by **Morton L. Isler**, *A Guide to the Behavior of Common Birds* by *David W. Stokes*, and *Birds of the Mayas* by **Anne Labastille Bowes** and **Ramon Castillo Perez**, to name just three of many.

Among the few non-bird books are two excellent field guides to mushrooms and a copy of *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* by **Jane Goodall**, signed by the author herself.

If you appreciate books on birds, you should look at the full list for what calls out to you — either for your own collection or as a gift to another birder in your life. Feel free to [contact me directly](#) if you have a special interest in the bird song recordings, prints or scientific papers.

— **Sharon**

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

100 CUPS OF DFO

Let's talk DFO: Meet me for a cuppa joe!

In last month's "From the President" column, I mentioned I'm starting a one-on-one listening campaign to learn what matters most to you about DFO. I call it "100 Cups of Coffee." It's an optimistic goal: If I could have as many as a hundred sit-downs with individual members, I'll have a pretty good idea of what our members care about, and their ideas about the direction of Denver Field Ornithologists.

Here's how it'll work. Contact me directly — now! Drop me an email at sharontinianow@gmail.com, and we'll set a time and place that work for you to share your thoughts, face-to-face, over a cup of coffee (or other beverage of your choice). We can do this either in person or via Zoom.

But we can't meet if you don't get in touch. Do so today! I can't wait to hear your ideas for our organization. Thanks for reaching out soon!

— **Sharon**





FROM THE EDITOR

We'll be right back: It's summer break . . . and coming in 2025, DFO's 90th birthday!

Patrick O'Driscoll

It's that time again. With the publication of this issue, our newsletter is on mid-year hiatus, *aka* summer break. With spring migration done, DFO takes our foot off the gas a little until the fall, when monthly programs return, as do all those southbound birds we'll be out looking for.

But here at *The Lark Bunting*, we'll keep the pedal to the floor. As I've noted in previous "From the Editor" messages, we're wading into an important task: Converting the dated, previous-century format of this newsletter to something that fits our 21st-century times. Watch your email inbox for a brief survey soon about DFO's newsletter: If and how you read it, what you like or hate about it, what YOU think this newsletter should be . . . or even IF it should be. PLEASE be frank and honest — but more, please TAKE the short survey when it arrives.

While I'm at it, there's something else we hope you'll weigh in on: DFO's celebration of our club's 90th birthday next year!

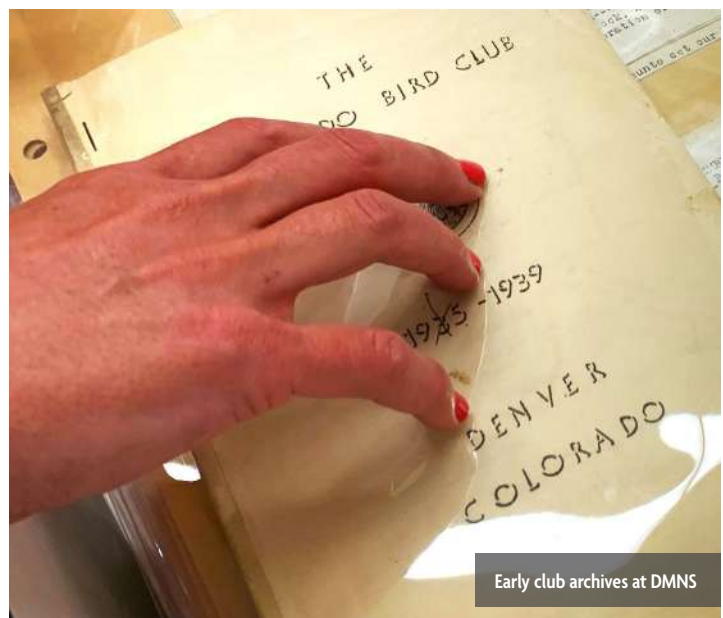
In the midst the Great Depression, DFO was founded as the Colorado Bird Club in 1935. Three decades later, club members and other Colorado birders decided to spin off a new birding organization with a statewide reach and role, and Colorado Field Ornithologists was born. At the same time, our field trip-oriented club changed its name to Denver Field Ornithologists.

We want to celebrate this milestone with as much looking back at DFO's colorful history as looking forward to our centennial in 2035 and beyond. To do that, we've already begun combing through DFO's archives, which includes boxes of documents, photos, scrapbooks and pamphlets under the professional care of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science's Archives department.

As we encounter old and sometimes forgotten names, dates and events, we want to ask now for members to share with us YOUR memories. What's more, if you have relatives who were in DFO earlier in our history, or know of people whose families or friends included long-ago DFO members, help us tell THEIR stories, too.

We'd love to interview those who are still with us about your memories of the club. For those who've passed on, perhaps you or the descendants of a past member might have photographs or even physical memorabilia — a vintage pair of binoculars, a well-worn birding hat — that we might photograph to include in our tribute to the club's past.

What'll that tribute look like? Perhaps a keepsake book? A special webpage tribute? We've just begun to explore the possibilities. What are your thoughts? Share your ideas as well as your DFO memories. Drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com or write to DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com. In the meantime, happy summer birding, and thank you for continuing to read *The Lark Bunting*.



Early club archives at DMNS

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

BIRD BOMBS EXPLODE WITH TROPICAL COLOR JUNE 20

Register [here](#) for **BIRD BOMBS: Tropical Color**, the next in DFO's popular series of bird ID miniwebinars. It's set for **June 20 at 7 p.m.** DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** will explore identifying orioles, tanagers, buntings and grosbeaks of the Front Range / Denver metro region. Bright adult males of these species aren't so challenging to ID, but what about the females and the immature males?

You can view videos of more than two dozen past episodes in the DFO website's [BIRD BOMBS library](#). Check out the recent [Spring Into Warblers 2](#) with its focus on Colorado's nesting warblers. Other good episodes for June birding include [It's a Flycatcher](#) and [Prairie Sparrows](#).

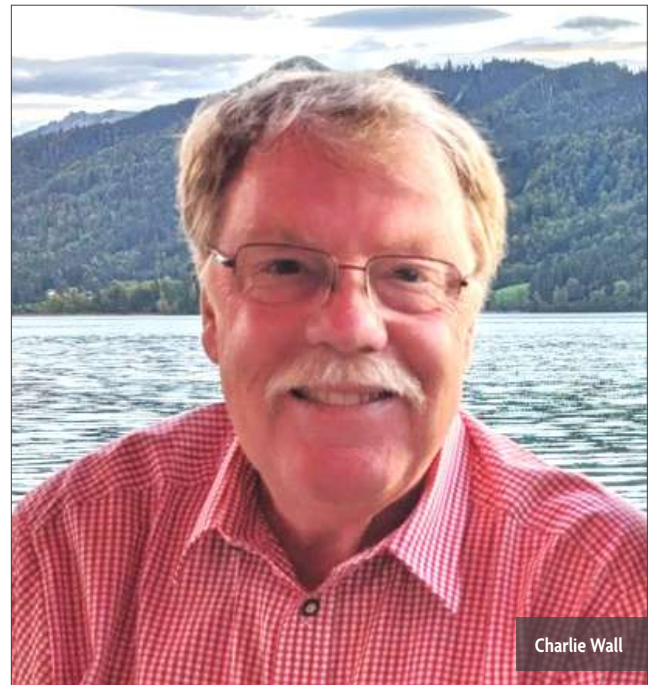


CHARLIE WALL'S "SPIRIT SOARED WHEN WATCHING HAWKS"

DFO member **Charlie Wall**, a Hawk Watch volunteer who died March 27 after falling ill at the Dinosaur Ridge observation post, is celebrated as a loving father, consummate soul mate, gardener, rockhound, foodie

(expert sourdough bread baker) and enthusiastic birder in a remembrance just published online by his family. As if those attributes weren't enough, Charlie also loved fishing, was a self-taught home brewmaster, restored a classic Pontiac GTO, and delighted in birding and Hawk Watch after joining DFO in 2021. As his obituary notes: "Charlie's spirit soared when watching hawks."

Wall, 69, who lived in Littleton with his wife, **Shelley**, is survived by two children and their families, four of his five siblings, and in-laws, nieces, nephews and cousins. In lieu of flowers, Charlie's family asks that donations may be made in his memory to DFO's Hawk Watch fund (<https://dfobirds.org/DFO/donate.aspx>) "or another organization of your choice. That would make Charlie smile." To read his full obituary on the DignityMemorial.com website, [click here](#).



DFO FLIES FLAG AT MIGRATORY BIRD DAY EVENT

DFO was among various bird conservation organizations with public outreach tables at a [World Migratory Bird Day](#) event on Saturday, May 11 in Bear Creek Lake Park in Lakewood. Representing DFO was **Michael** and **Karen Fernandez**, our Communications & Outreach chair, who reported about three dozen park visitors stopped at our table to learn more about DFO at the 10 a.m.-2 p.m. event. DFO distributed "rack

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card” fliers about the club in addition to engaging kids and their parents in coloring activities and binoculars training. The park’s birds also played a big role. “We had a great show of local and migrating birds nearby and overhead during the event,” Fernandez said, “which helped generate enthusiasm for our mission.”



GOT AN EAR FOR BIRDS? BIRD SURVEY NEEDS YOU NOW

The continent’s premier long-term bird monitoring program, the [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#)

(BBS), is now underway. But nearly three dozen vacant routes around Colorado need volunteer observers now. Many routes are in interesting parts of the state and some are near the Denver area. The national BBS’s [Vacant Routes](#) page displays routes by state, viewable on the online map, along with species recorded on the routes in previous years.

But the observation window is already open (May 27-July 7) and experienced birders with “significant field ID skills (especially by ear) and familiarity with the birds that live in the region” are encouraged to apply ASAP, says BBS state coordinator **David Suddjian** (who is also DFO’s Field Trips chair). He notes that BBS seeks a minimum 3-year commitment for surveyors. Participants “should be able to identify the species known to be along the route by sound,” Suddjian adds. “That is, you and not Merlin,” the bird sound ID smartphone app.

A BBS surveyor since 1992, Suddjian calls it “the best part of my birding year.” Suddjian, who says he is “happy to talk about what is needed and how to prepare with anyone who is interested,” can be reached at dsuddjian@gmail.com.

WHIP-POOR-WILL PRESENTER’S FOLLOW-UP ON AUDUBON

On the heels of his April 29 DFO monthly program presentation on whip-poor-wills, DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** made the *Audubon Magazine* webpages in May with a related, “As the Whip-poor-will’s Chant Wanes, Our

Cultural Loss Grows.” It opens with **Henry David Thoreau** encountering multiple Eastern Whip-poor-wills on a moonlit evening outside Concord, MA in 1851. Del Rosso goes on to document and lament latter-day “extinctions of experience” for our broader culture as the once-common calls of whip-poor-wills recede with the advance of development and species decline. It closes with Del Rosso himself on a trip home to the woods of New York’s Hudson River Valley, searching to hear again the call-and-answer of the whip-poor-will song. [Click here](#) to read Jared’s essay.



BIRD RENAMING UPDATE: TRYING TO GET PAST “HARMFUL”

The American Ornithological Society, which is launching a [six-species pilot project](#) in its effort to

replace the names of North American bird species named after people, will likely get an earful from vocal opponents this fall in Colorado. Not only did a popular petition drive against wholesale name changing originate here in our state, but a public forum on the controversial project also is scheduled at AOS’s annual meeting. Guess where? In Estes Park Oct. 1-5 at the AOS [Summit for the Birds](#).

The society’s November 2023 decision to replace “harmful” eponymous names rubbed a number of Colorado birders the wrong way. Led by Fort Collins birder **Rachel Kolokoff Hopper**, a Change.org petition drive has enlisted about 6,350 signatures opposing the society’s “one-sided decision” to purge eponymous (people) names from scores of bird species and replace them with names that highlight aspects of their appearance, behavior, habitat or location. The petition count is approaching three times as many signatures as another 2020 petition that set in motion the society leadership’s eventual decision to seek name changes for up to 150 species.

Meanwhile, the six pilot species up first for name changes include several familiar names: Inca Dove, Townsend’s Solitaire, Maui Parrotbill, Bachman’s Sparrow, Scott’s Oriole and Townsend’s Warbler.



Nic Korte
Lee Gelatt Photography

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Monday, Aug. 26, 2024
7 p.m. MDT

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Top:
Red-headed Barbet in Costa Rica
Nic Korte



Bottom:
Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in Costa Rica
Nic Korte

Patrick O'Driscoll

There's no missing the call to well-informed activism — especially where Mother Earth is concerned — in that familiar turn of phrase, “Think globally, act locally.”

Just now, longtime western Colorado wildlife conservationist **Nic Korte** suggests that North American birders try putting a Western Hemispheric twist to it: Think *tropically*, act locally.

Korte says he'll call us to that in “*No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado*,” his upcoming DFO evening program later this summer — **Monday, Aug. 26, at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom webinar.

“Local actions here affect birds in the tropics,” he explains. “Some of those birds spend part of their lives in Colorado. Avoiding palm oil in products you buy helps not just the birds whose year-round tropical habitat might be saved, but also birds that live part of the year here in North America.”

Indeed, this is the time when birds so familiar to us as spring migrants and summer nesters have returned north from their neotropical fall and winter haunts in southern Mexico, Central and South America: Tanagers. Orioles. Grosbeaks. Buntings. Flycatchers. Warblers. Not to mention every Swainson's Hawk on the planet.

Korte, a 40-year resident of Grand Junction, has been the conservation chair of Grand Valley Audubon Society for more than two decades and a board member for nearly three. And he leads the society's Western Screech-Owl observation project, with several hundred Grand Valley residents engaged in a community science effort with national status.

But Korte has also made 30-plus trips to the tropics. “I find the diversity of everything fascinating. There's so much to see, so many types of plants, butterflies, etc.” He has even written a book, *Ten Jungle Days* (Outskirts Press), that combines human and natural history, personal memoir and nature discovery travel in the Costa Rican rainforest. His encounters there have included exotic amphibians and anteaters, climbing rats, spider monkeys and “the delightful siren call of extraordinary birds.”

Continued on page 11

The motivation behind his DFO talk “is not to have people ‘know’ about the issues, but to inspire them to do something,” Korte says. He thinks the fact that many of “our” birds spend more of their lives in the neotropics gives us a greater stake in their welfare there.

Growing up in the farmlands of rural southern Illinois, “I was always interested in birds,” Korte says, “but if you weren’t harvesting something, whatever you were doing was considered wasteful. The only way to express outdoor interest then was hunting and fishing.”

Indoors, the family’s 1956 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia* revealed Nic’s true interest. “The ‘B’ volume,” he says, “has several very worn pages — the pages on birds. I wore them out looking at them.”

He grew up to become a geochemist. But after graduate school, he worked at the University of Arizona in Tucson, “where I actually encountered birders” for the first time — and found a life’s hobby.

In 2015, Korte received Bird Conservancy of the Rockies’ Richard G. Levad Award for “distinguished service to the ornithological community.” In 2019, National Audubon awarded him its William Dutcher Award for “leadership in the birding community of Western Colorado.” Follow his blog at [Birds and More – Birding and conservation in Western Colorado](#).

V IS FOR VOLUNTEER

Volunteer opportunities: Come help DFO serve our members

Have you ever wondered who and what make DFO run?

The answer is simple, and you probably already know it: People like YOU do. Denver Field Ornithologists functions thanks to volunteers who step forward to ask: How can I help? We’ve got a few answers below, and we plan to provide more suggestions in every newsletter from now on.

As an all-volunteer organization, DFO exists only because people like you step up to offer your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. Whether it’s a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless assets.

At the moment, here are some priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com for more details. Come join us, won’t you?

Social Media Poster (Communications & Outreach Committee)

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO’s Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms, your role could be intermittent, on an as-needed basis. We also seek expertise in helping DFO develop a strategic plan for our social media communications

Assistant Programs Manager

Working with DFO Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, this volunteer helps develop and arrange DFO’s monthly evening programs, and helps write and post notices, articles and links promoting these Zoom-based presentations on social media and in DFO’s newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*

Technical Communications Adviser

DFO needs a member with “techie” background, and knowledge and interest in online streaming and event recording (audio-video) to help present programs and conduct meetings and webinars

Newsletter Assistant

You’ll help compile and write short items and “blurbs” about DFO events, programs, club news and people for *The Lark Bunting*, our monthly (10 times a year) newsletter. Basic writing ability is a plus, but your interest and ideas about what to write and show are a double-plus



Ted Floyd
© Abby Santurbane Photography

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9

Ted Floyd
Monday, Sept. 23, 2024
7 p.m. MDT

Look for registration information for this Zoom presentation in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*

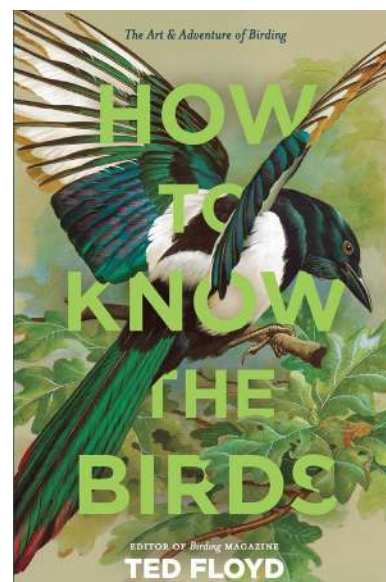
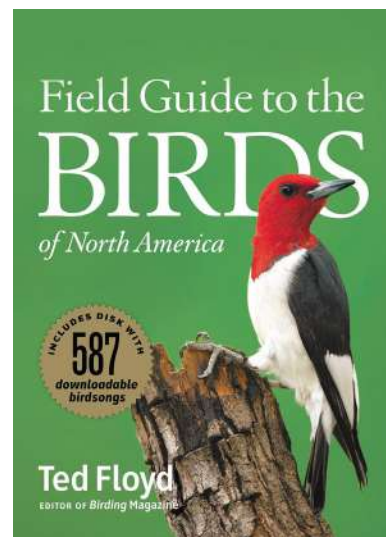
The world of birding is changing — and changing fast. eBird and the Merlin Bird ID app continue to massively alter the way we bird. Digital resources like the Cornell Lab's [Macaulay Library](#) deliver terabytes of amazing bird media to the whole world. Top-line optics maker Swarovski has launched a “[smart](#)” [binocular](#) that actually works. (“AI-supported . . . digital intelligence . . . identification function” and more, for only \$4,799!)

Meanwhile, the [American Ornithological Society](#) has begun the process of renaming some of the most familiar birds in Colorado and beyond, with no small amount of controversy swirling, if not raging, around it. (Guess where the AOS’s “Summit for the Birds” annual meeting is this fall? Mm-hmm: [Estes Park, CO, Oct 1-5!](#))

Amidst all this and more, our “man on the inside” — distinguished Colorado birdsoothsayer, guidebook author and aviajournalist **Ted Floyd** — will provide us with all the latest on new knowledge, new technologies, new names, and, ultimately, new ways of engaging and appreciating the world around us . . . at least as of September 2024.

Hence, the title of his latest DFO monthly evening program, “*The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9*,” on **Monday, Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. And yes: Ted says you can expect it to all change again pretty soon thereafter.

Floyd, who last spoke to DFO almost exactly two years to the day before this presentation (his Sept. 26, 2022 topic was “[Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study in the Age of Zoomers and Alphas](#)”), is an engaging and energetic speaker. Ted is also the longtime editor of *Birding* magazine, the award-winning flagship publication of the American Birding Association. He has written five bird books — including the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (HarperCollins, 2008) and *How to Know the Birds* (National Geographic, 2019) — and he has three more on the way. He has also written more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. He is a frequent speaker at bird festivals, bird club meetings, and ornithological conferences.



Continued on page 13

Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, applying new media and emerging technologies toward the appreciation of nature, and interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners (he regularly leads popular field trips in and around Boulder County, where he and his family live in Lafayette). Ted has served on the boards of Western Field Ornithologists and Colorado Field Ornithologists, and he remains heavily involved in both organizations. He holds a Ph.D. in ecology from Penn State University and has taught biology, math, and statistics to everyone from second graders to advanced graduate students.

Ted is a recent recipient (2022) of the ABA's Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service, recognizing his 20-plus years of contributions to the association. He is a frequent guest on the American Birding podcast and a prolific content generator for ABA's online platforms. He is especially proud of his involvement in the association's Young Birder programs.

BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

Injured bird? Free CO-based app locates help fast

Patrick O'Driscoll

This may sound new to you, but Boulder-based nonprofit [Mission: Animal Help Now](#) (AHNow) has been linking animal emergencies with wildlife aid experts locally since 2011 and nationally since 2012. It bills itself as America's first coast-to-coast wildlife emergency smartphone app, available free for iPhone and Android devices.

The need is huge. AHNow estimates that between 2 and 5 billion birds and 7 and 24 billion animals die annually in "wildlife incidents" in the US. With the app in hand or [this link to the online reporting page](#), DFO birders in the field needn't worry where to turn if they encounter injured, orphaned or distressed birds or other animal emergencies.

The app can immediately connect users "with the most appropriate time- and location-specific resources and services," Animal Help Now says. Its database contains 3,700 helpers — wildlife rehabilitators, rescues and hotlines, plus veterinarians who treat wildlife.

The free service even links to businesses that use humane methods to resolve people-wildlife conflicts — like removal of raccoons from attics or skunks from under porches. It's also a potential lifesaver for domestic critters. If a user is out of town, a related help-and-rescue app can alert and coordinate quickly with neighbors to evacuate the absent user's pets in an emergency.

AHNow can help users with other domestic animal emergencies, too: lost-and-found for companion animals, response to animal abuse and neglect, natural disasters. Finally, the nonprofit advocates for wildlife and educates the public in reducing everyday threats to wild animals, from window and vehicle strikes to dog and cat attacks.

The app is easy to use. Open and confirm where you are (if not your default location) and click on the type of need: wildlife emergency, wildlife conflict or "other animal issue." The app lists the nearest appropriate resources for each. With another click, each listing displays phone, internet and social media links.

To get the app or to volunteer, donate or learn more about AHNow, [click here](#).



Final frontier: 6-day trip adds last 4 Colorado counties to DFO's list

David Suddjian

In late May, Denver Field Ornithologists' longest-ever driving field trip in Colorado completed our club's goal of leading field trips in all 64 of the state's counties. Not only did we color in our entire eBird map of Colorado counties birded, we also birded 13 others on our six-day, 1,200-mile loop.

Our three-vehicle caravan of a dozen birders journeyed to southwestern Colorado May 19-24 (with a first-ever side trip into Utah). Four of the 17 Colorado counties were first-ever destinations for DFO: Mineral, Archuleta, Dolores and San Juan. Seven more were DFO destinations for just the second time: Rio Grande, Hinsdale, La Plata, Montezuma, Ouray, Montrose and Delta.

The grand result for our team of DFO birders was a collective total of 154 species on 110 eBird checklists. (Trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/242223>) The count included many great birds, including Grace's and Lucy's warblers, Acorn Woodpecker, Black-throated Sparrow, Gray Vireo, Lewis's Woodpecker, American Bittern, Hammond's and Willow flycatchers, Dusky Grouse and Flammulated Owl. While in the neighborhood, we added 11 species for Utah when we dipped into the Beehive State's side of Hovenweep National Monument, which has ancestral Puebloan sites in Colorado, too.

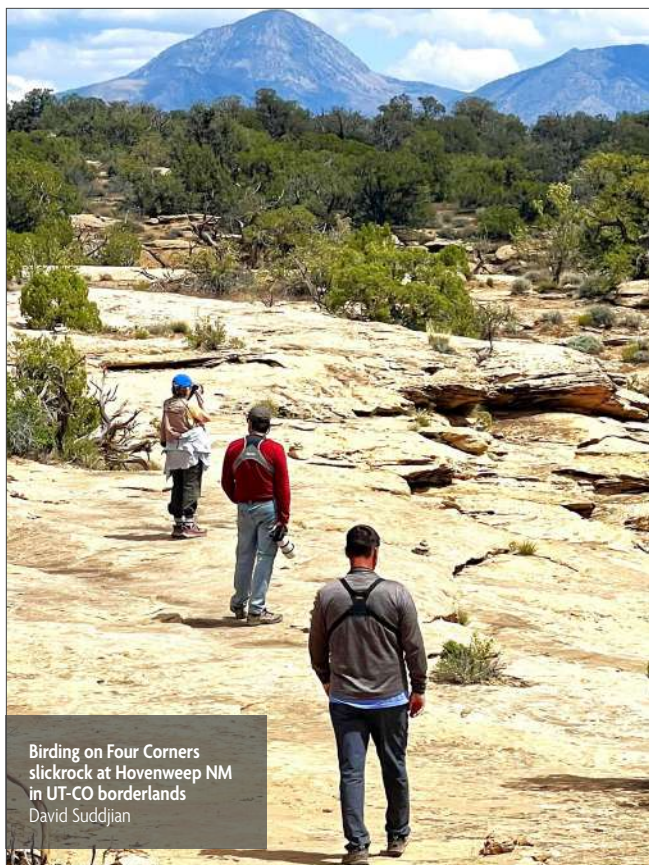
This epic trip touched iconic birding spots and wonderful habitats in what for us is a far corner of our state. DFO leads hundreds of field trips each year, but only rarely have we ventured far west of the Continental Divide. We are grateful to drivers **Linda Purcell**, **Luke Jaramillo** and **Chip Dawes** for steering us safely across the state.

My only regret was not spending more time in Archuleta County on a day too loaded with other stops. But that, and having seen only a small part of big Dolores County, means DFO should plan for more great trips back to Colorado's corner of the Four Corners.



DFO's expedition team at Bogy Draw in Montezuma County

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FIELD TRIPS *cont from page 14*

Memorable birding moments abounded daily, but here are a few that especially stood out, by species and location:

Red-necked Phalaropes — hundreds in great light at Park County's Buffalo Creek Reservoir

American Bitterns — hoped-for and found at Russell Lakes SWA in Saguache County

Dusky Grouse — a female gave us long looks along Road 430 in Mineral County

Hammond's Flycatcher — amid the pines of Archuleta County's East Fork Campground

Lewis's Woodpecker — We found our first on an unplanned drive through pasture and Ponderosas on Road 635 in Hinsdale County

Acorn Woodpecker, Virginia's Warbler — two treasures found in the Rafter J subdivision in La Plata County, where Pastorius Reservoir SWA also yielded magnificent spring views and Junction Creek Campground gave us our first Grace's Warbler

Gray Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Flammulated Owl, wild horses. Hovenweep, moon over the La Platas — a few of the many charms of Montezuma County

Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, Glade Lake — an amazing stop for forest birds in Road 504's Ponderosa Pines in Dolores County

Mountain beauty — the San Juans in San Juan County, of course

Gambel's Quail, Common Loon, Marsh Wren — early and later delights at Sweitzer Lake SP in Delta County

Chukar, singing Black-throated Sparrow — on our way home, a welcome in Cameo, the coal-mine ghost town in Mesa County

County-by-county species totals for the trip, roughly chronological order: Park County, 26 species; Chaffee, 6; Saguache, 47; Rio Grande, 14; Mineral, 29; Archuleta, 41; Hinsdale, 20; La Plata, 78; Montezuma, 103; Dolores, 72; San Juan, 37; Ouray, 10; Montrose, 17; Delta, 50; Mesa, 29; Garfield, 5, and Eagle, 3.

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FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

May DFO trips *In Focus*

Peak spring migration month in Colorado resulted in 26 DFO field trips in May 2024. Of those, participants took and shared pictures of “birders birding” on 12 trips. If you’re on DFO outings in June and/or July, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out in August. We’ll choose one picture for each field trip. Birders-in-action shots are preferred, but posed group pictures are acceptable, too.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month — in this case, **Wednesday, July 31** for June and July trips. Thanks!

APRIL 30
Dinosaur Ridge
(Jefferson County)

Leader
Ajit and Liza Antony

Participants
Susan Young, Michele Radice, Nancy Donovan,
Rajkumar Manikandan, JP Young

Spotting raptors during April 30 field trip
atop Dinosaur Ridge
(Nancy Donovan)



MAY 5
First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch
(Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Becky Russell, Colleen Nunn, Karen Bellina, Joe Chen,
Christine Macdonald, Debby Miller, Linda Klumpers

Field trippers look high up during May 5 outing
to First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch in Denver
(Jason B. Bidgood)

Continued on page 18



MAY 9
Roxborough SP
(Douglas)

Leader
Bea Weaver

Participants
Marjorie Middleton, Jeanne Dillon,
Michelle Verostko, Alison Bishop,
Chip Dawes, Christopher Curwen

*A trailside pose by field trippers on
DFO's May 9 outing to Roxborough SP
(Alison Bishop)*

MAY 10
Denver Area Parks
(Denver)

Leader
Nate Bond

Participants
Becky Russell, Julia Auckland,
Christopher Curwen, Sharon Tinianow

*Participants in May 10 Denver parks
bike-and-bird trip after spotting Summer Tanager
at Phil Milstein Park
(Nate Bond)*



Continued on page 19

MAY 11
Denver City Park
(Douglas)

Leader
Patrick O'Driscoll

Participants
Ajit and Liza Antony, Henrika McCoy, Glenn Jacoby,
Jordan Nicholls, Joe Chen, Linda Lujan, Pete Brush,
Sharon Guenther, Kyle and Kathleen Sandersen,
Morgan Kahle, Janet Johnston

A full house of 14 birders pursuing flycatchers
during May 11 field trip in Denver City Park
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



MAY 14
Deer Creek Canyon
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Michelle Verostko, Janet Johnston,
Melody Serra, Christian Caryl, Alison Kondler

Looking for Lazuli Bunting on
Deer Creek Canyon field trip May 14
(David Suddjian)



MAY 15
**Fowler + Northern
Spring Brook Trails**
(Boulder)

Leader
Peter Ruprecht

Participants
Karen Clark, Patricia Kuzma Sell,
Joe Chen, Ben Wilcox

Birders on May 15 field trip to Fowler +
Northern Spring Brook trails in Boulder County
(Joe Chen)



Continued on page 20



MAY 15-26

Southeastern Arizona (multiple counties)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Liza and Ajit Antony, Amy and Shmuel Korengut, Betsy Goodwin, Alison Bishop, Mary Fran O'Connor, Linda Cunico, Christopher Curwen, Thomas Loucks, Bill Turner, Peggy Gonder

Joey Kellner, Chris Curwen and Ajit Antony fix huge holes in Carr Canyon Road so caravan of Southeast AZ May 15-26 field trippers can reach hotspot to see Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee and Yellow-eyed Junco
(Liza Antony)

MAY 19-24

Southwest Colorado Tour (17 counties)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Linda Purcell, Gary Witt, Tresa Moulton, Betsy Rumely, Charlie and Mary Saunders, Chip Dawes, Edie Israel, Luke Jaramillo, Betty Glass, Courtney Rella

All eyes are up as May 19-24 SW Colorado field trippers make DFO's first visit to Mineral County en route to Wolf Creek Pass
(Chip Dawes)



MAY 20

Chico Basin Ranch (El Paso, Pueblo)

Leader

Jessica Miller

Participants

Deborah Hebblewhite, Joel Jones, Joe Chen, Margo Constable, Sara Jaramillo, Ian de la Rosa, Oliver Urdiales, Lisa Forte, Debby Miller, Andrea Bank

Field trippers May 20 on DFO's only outing to Chico Basin Ranch in short spring season
(Joe Chen)



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MAY 26
**Prospect Park /
Wheat Ridge Greenbelt**
(Jefferson)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuelar

Participants
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Denise Reznicek,
Victoria Miles, Sophie Benmore, Virginia Gulakowski,
Becky Russell, Cassandra Stroud, Lorna Thomas,
Melody Serra, Lynn Slaga

**Birders on May 26 trip to Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
pause streamside for a closer look**
(Melody Serra)

MAY 27
Lair o' the Bear Park
(Jefferson)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lisa Forte, Emily Yates,
Scott Levine, Nadiyah Watts, Cynthia Breidenbach,
Lynn Slaga, John Featherstone

**John Featherstone heads up trail on field trip
through Lair o' the Bear Park in JeffCo**
(Gigi Zarzuela)



MAY 27
Quincy Reservoir, Aurora
(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Mary Ramsey, Leianna Schroeder, Joe Chen,
Cynthia Cestkowski, Lynn Bakken

**DFO'ers hiking the path at Quincy Reservoir
on a 45-species field trip May 27**
(Joe Chen)





Spring migration field trip participants May 20 pose at Chico Basin Ranch headquarters in El Paso County
Joe Chen

COLORADO BIRDING

How it went: 6 quiet weeks of half-day spring migration birding at Chico Basin

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first short spring season of birding under new access limits at Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties is now in the eBird books. After shutting down year-round, anytime entry for birders, the state-owned cattle ranch and birding-rich “migrant trap” southeast of Colorado Springs reopened on April 29. Those who booked daily reservations online (mandatory; no more same-day signups in person) were allowed onto the property, mornings only, for six weeks of spring-migration birding that ended June 2.

DFO led just one Chico Basin field trip this spring under the new regulations, but it was a doozie. Trip leader **Jessica Miller** and 10 other birders logged a whopping 77 species on May 20 in just six hours onsite. That’s because the Colorado State Land Board’s new rules inexplicably limited birder access to the

property from only 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily in a season already severely shorter than in the past.

Anecdotally, however, an underwhelming inflow of migrant birds this spring may have dampened birder interest, according to Aiken Audubon, the Pikes Peak region chapter that managed spring birding at the ranch under a lease with the land board. “The numbers are down so far for spring migration, compared to last year,” said Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges**, who coordinated the new access process. “You may have seen the bird bander’s post (on the COBirds list-serv) saying it’s the slowest she’s seen in her few years banding at Chico.” The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies has operated a banding station at the ranch in spring and fall for many years.

“We haven’t had much interesting weather to drop birds down into our area,” Hodges added, “other than one crazy fallout day at Clear Spring Ranch,” another popular birding spot about 12 miles northwest of Chico Basin as the crow flies.

Before the season began, there were worries that the land board’s strict new limit of only 20 birders a day on the ranch would “sell out” frequently, especially on weekends, denying more birders the opportunity to visit a premier Colorado birding location. But the lighter traffic of avian migrants may have rendered that a non-issue.

“I think the only day that was sold out was the day our Monday Birders visited the ranch,” Hodges said, referring to a weekly birding group in the Pikes Peak region similar to metro Denver’s Tuesday Birders. “As I’ve watched registrations come in, there hasn’t been a date that’s had overwhelming interest.”

The numbers of birds and people at the banding station are one measure of the first season under the land board’s new rules. Another is the number of checklists that Chico Basin birders filed to eBird during the April 29-June 2 period — a useful if imperfect marker because some birders may not use eBird.

For the season’s 35 days in late April, May and early June, birders filed 467 checklists, or an average of 13 total a day. Since some birders probably filed as many as two to five checklists (the number of available birding hotspots, including two general ones for El Paso and Pueblo counties, which bisect the ranch), those results suggest even fewer daily visitors on average, well under the 20-per-day limit.

Continued on page 23

Birders apparently did not abuse the honor system under which they were left to self-police their movements and time spent on the ranch. “As far as I know, only one birder, part of a group of two I think, stayed for an hour or two past the 1 p.m. deadline,” Hodges said. “The birder apologized to me after I reached out.” The land board also restricted birder travel to only three of Chico Basin’s six eBird hotspots within a few minutes’ drive from the ranch entrance.

After the slow spring, Aiken’s challenge now is to recoup expenses. Although its 5-year birding lease with the land board is “no-fee,” the club incurs various outlays — portable toilet rental, liability insurance, the birding reservation system, signs and other overhead. It collected \$15 daily admission from each birder but is required to split that revenue with the Bird Conservancy banding station.

In about three months, the ranch will reopen (Sept. 2 through Oct. 6) for autumn migration under the same rules and limits. “Since fall birding is a good deal slower than spring birding, I’m guessing that Aiken won’t cover our Chico costs this year,” Hodges said.



Welcome to new DFO members

Audrey Anderson of Boulder; Jason Carroll and Michelle Loader, Denver; Claire Frazier, Arvada; Zachary Haag, Springfield; Jess Kugler, Littleton; Alan Schmitz and Grace Bear, Centennial; Terry Tedford, Castle Rock; Mike Tupper and Naseem Munshi, Lafayette

Thank you for your contribution

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Gail Ferber, Tina Peters, Becky Russell

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Lee and Linda Farrell, Gail Ferber, Janet Peters and Michael Lupini in memory of Ann Bonnell, and David Hill in memory of Charlie Wall



Brant
Joe Chen



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

It's what's for dinner: food prep with the “butcherbird” of the Colorado prairie

Patrick O'Driscoll

For birders, photographers and, yes, birders who are photographers, chance encounters and unscripted moments in the field are often the most meaningful.

DFO member **Dave Prentice** had one this spring during a private citizen-science project at a ranch on Colorado's eastern Plains. As a member of the Denver area Birding and Beers Meetup group led by **Sheridan Samano**, Prentice was exploring the dried-out riverbed of Big Sandy Creek on Flying Diamond Ranch, an Audubon-certified “bird-friendly” spread north of Kit Carson.

Photos by David Prentice

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Loggerhead Shrike arriving
with still-intact Sphinx Moth



Preparing to impale its catch



The shrike landed with its prey in a scrubby tree like these



Now the bird hooks the moth onto a thin, pointed branch

LAST WORD *cont from page 25*

The occasion was a private-access “BioBlitz” on May 4 to document biodiversity on the ranch. At mid-morning, Prentice and about 10 other birders were moving through the dry drainage “when I noticed a Loggerhead Shrike fly into a nearby bush” — a short, scrubby and leafless prairie tree. The bird “was carrying a [White-lined Sphinx moth](#),” Prentice said. “I was standing quite close, but the shrike didn’t seem bothered by me. It proceeded to re-position and impale the moth on a short branch, tear the wings off and then literally pose with it. It just chilled for a long time.”

That “long time” was barely three minutes, but Prentice was mesmerized, and his camera was busy. “I excitedly shared the news with the other members of the group. Unfortunately, no one else got to witness it, but it was so nice to have some photos to share.”

Later, Prentice was intrigued by how this masked hunter seemed to posture with its prey once it had de-winged the body. “Possibly attempting to attract a mate?” he wondered. “This was the first time I’ve observed a shrike impaling prey. It seems like everyone thinks the shrike impales its prey to cache for later, but I read something interesting in my National Geographic birding guide: ‘They mostly impale their prey on thorns. Recent research indicates that this is to mark territory and attract mates.’ ”

Whatever its intent, the bird certainly caught Prentice’s eye. “I took about 200 shots over a 3-minute encounter! I was psyched to have my camera and document the behavior. I’d never seen a shrike encounter, so that was really cool.”

Cool for us, too.

Continued on page 27



And goes to work field dressing its catch



With hooked bill, the shrike begins the dismemberment



Here a wing . . .



There a wing . . .



The crunchy parts come off



With the last bits now removed



It's time to admire and show off its prize



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY SUMMER BIRDING!

American Kestrels mating in
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
Dave Prentice



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 09 | SEPTEMBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Now's the time to convert
turf yards into native gardens

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Celebrating our club's
volunteer trip leaders

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Sky Islands birding rerun
puts the road in road trip

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FIELD TRIPPING

DFO's trip chair leads
his 500th field trip

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Red-headed Woodpecker
Chico Basin Ranch
El Paso-Pueblo counties
John Breitsch



ON THE COVER

Red-headed Woodpecker: unmistakable and rare hereabouts, but not unseen

Patrick O'Driscoll

It may be anecdotal, but a show of hands, please: Who's seen a Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) somewhere along the Front Range where you haven't seen one before? I know I was surprised four years ago when I saw one at Heron Pond Natural Area, in industrial Denver's rather grungy underbelly, less than 4 miles from downtown.

Perhaps we're simply seeing them more now than before. After all, that Denver sighting was in the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic, when birding surged dramatically. More eyes, more birds? For a species marked by erratic rises and falls in population over the past two centuries, occasional sightings around metro Denver are always encouraging. Red-headed woodpeckers are more associated with the eastern half of the country.



John Breitsch, a night-shift nuclear pharmacy tech, first worked overnights in his 20s, moved to Colorado in his 30s, began birding at 40 and led his first DFO

field trip just after turning 50. He has more than 10,000 bird images on his Flickr webpage. Now 60, John lives at home in Denver's Green Valley Ranch neighborhood.

DFO member and field trip leader **John Breitsch** photographed this month's cover bird in 2016 at Chico Basin Ranch, the incomparable prairie birding hotspot southeast of Colorado Springs. If a place has mature trees with nestable cavities (and Chico Basin does), Red-headed Woodpeckers are a possibility. They seem to favor tall dead-tree snags and branches. Some researchers think competition with other cavity-nesters like European Starlings may be a factor in their broader decline.

Is the one you just saw a female or male? There's the rub: In the field, they look identical — “sexually monomorphic,” as the Cornell Lab's *Birds of the World* puts it. Red-headed woodpeckers are omnivorous, foraging as much on the ground as in trees for acorns, nuts, berries and other fruit, grasshoppers, beetles, seeds, waste grain in farm fields, bird eggs and nestlings and even mice. They're also very adept flycatchers. Red-headed is one of only four woodpecker species in the world that cache food for later. Culturally, they were a war symbol for the Cherokee people, and Plains tribesmen used their bright heads as war ornaments in battle.

Just now they're getting ready to migrate away for winter, but they won't fly far. The species winters entirely inside the US — across much of the South and East from the Texas Panhandle and Gulf Coast to New York state.

Fun fact: Contrary to some common belief, cartoon character Woody Woodpecker is not a Red-headed Woodpecker, though his head is red. Cartoonist **Walter Lantz** modeled Woody after the Pileated Woodpecker, whose broad North American range of mature forests conspicuously skirts outside the Plains and Intermountain West.

If the Red-headed Woodpecker is your “spark” bird, you're in prominent company. **Alexander Wilson** (1766-1813), the “father of American ornithology” for whom five species of warbler, plover, phalarope, snipe and storm-petrel are named, was inspired to his career after seeing one.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park.



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Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

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Next deadline: Saturday, August 31, 2024





**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Got natives? Now's a great time to start converting turf to bird-friendly blooms



Wildflowers taking over
Washington Park's Mount
Vernon Garden in Denver
Sharon Tinianow

Sharon Tinianow

Last November, I devoted my column here to promoting the habitat benefits for birds, butterflies and bees if you replace turf grass with native plants in your home landscape. If you haven't done it yet, late summer is a great time to reconsider.

Native wildflowers, shrubs and grasses are blooming prolifically right now, so there is plenty to inspire you. The replanting plans you make now can be carried out in fall and spring. By this time next year, you could have bird-friendly habitat on your own property, whether it's a yard, patio, balcony or container garden.

Smart and sensible conversion of lawns to bird-friendly yardscapes has been something of a theme for DFO over the past year. Besides my columns on the topic, DFO hosted **Jim Tolstrup** from the [High Plains Environmental Center](#) in Loveland for our monthly evening program last February, "Gardening on the Wild Side." (Watch the video on the DFO website's "Past Programs" page at <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>.)

Coming up on Aug. 23, field trip leader and Conservation Committee chair **Courtney Rella** will lead a Birds Plus + Gardens field trip to the 2-acre home wildscape of DFO Board member **Tina Jones** in Littleton. (Sign up on the Field Trips pages at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/Register.aspx?TripID=19833>.) Tina has been landscaping for the birds for more than two decades; she possesses extensive knowledge of native plants and the birds that depend on them. (This trip is full, but sign up for a spot on the waiting list.)

Want more inspiration? Look no further than municipal parks in Denver. Washington Park's Mount Vernon Garden (a replica of **Martha Washington's** gardens on the first US president's historic Virginia estate) looks radically different from years past. Located in the south-central part of the park near the East Mississippi-South Franklin entrance, its tidy plots of annuals and herbs have been supplanted by a sampler of Colorado native plants that host a variety of insects and attract a variety of birds.

The same can be said for WashPark's Big Gardens to the north and west along South Downing Street. This Victorian-style garden still includes rosebushes and some non-natives, but horticulturalist **Skyler Smith** of Denver Parks & Recreation is transforming much of the gardenscape into native perennials that attract yet more pollinators and birds. (A Denver Public Library Discovery Walk of the gardens with Smith is scheduled for Aug. 21, with details at <https://www.denverlibrary.org/event/discover-walks-big-gardens-washington-park>.)

Grasmere Lake at the south end of the park is under different management, too. Groundskeepers no longer mow right up to the stone-and-concrete shoreline, instead leaving a buffer of plants to grow into shelter for nesting waterfowl and cover for other wild creatures. It doesn't interfere with fishing, either.

Continued on page 6

Over at Denver City Park, more inspiration lies in an untamed street-front wildflower garden by the greenhouses at the park's northwest entrance. Stretching for half a block along east 23rd Avenue across from City Park Golf Course, it is a gloriously unkempt, multicolor explosion of blanketflower, tansyasters, coreopsis, coneflower, penstemons, yarrow, sunflower, hyssop, milkweed, Columbines and other wildflowers too numerous to list.

Beyond the park system, pockets of thriving natives dot our cityscape. One of the most unique is SummerHome Garden at 651 S. Vine St., a few blocks northeast of Washington Park. When next-door neighbor **Lisa Negri** saw the small house and lot there come on the market, she bought it with intent to fix and flip. But the house couldn't be saved, and she was loath to scrape off and rebuild. She did scrape the lot, but turned it instead (with help from volunteers) into an urban haven of native plants and water for wildlife, and peace and beauty for people. "Open to the public in growing season," Negri now proclaims from SummerHome's own website at <https://summerhomegarden.com/>.

I stopped by on a recent morning and enjoyed a Broad-tailed Hummingbird nectaring on penstemon flowers. Imagine if more yards and empty spaces were planted this way. How many more birds might thrive if we moved beyond "turf, tar and trees" and back to a "Coloradoscape," as my friend **Deb Lebow** calls it.

Deb is on the board of Wild Ones Front Range, the local chapter of a movement to plant more biodiverse native vegetation in our urban and suburban landscapes. I encourage you to explore resources that might help with your own habitat initiative. You can start at the Wild Ones website at <https://frontrange.wildones.org/> or another great resource, Audubon of the Rockies' Habitat Hero program at <https://rockies.audubon.org/habitat-hero>.

Happy birding (and gardening)!

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



SummerHome wildflower garden in
Denver's Washington Park neighborhood
Sharon Tinianow



Broad-tailed hummingbird in
SummerHome garden
Sharon Tinianow



Washington Park's Perennial Garden
Sharon Tinianow

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

CHARLIE CHASE TO BE DFO'S NEW VEEP

Longtime Colorado birder **Charlie Chase** was to be appointed interim vice president by the DFO Board at its Aug. 8 meeting. He fills a club office vacant since **Matt Rodgers** resigned earlier this year. A veteran field trip leader and former curator of birds for the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Nature & Science), he will serve as an appointee until the next DFO annual election, scheduled for April 2025. Chase, a Denver resident, once led bird and ecological field trips all over Colorado, some in connection with the first attempts to atlas all vertebrates in the state. He also led winter raptor trips around the perimeter of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal when it was a military facility closed to outsiders, long before it became a national wildlife refuge. Chase left Colorado to pursue a doctorate in 1998, returning seven years later, at which point he joined DFO.



Charlie Chase

COLORADO PLOVERS UP NEXT FOR AUG. 15 BIRD BOMBS

I say *P-LOVE-er*, you say *P-LOH-ver*. By any pronunciation, they are cool shorebirds. And DFO's next BIRD BOMBS identification mini-webinar is "Colorado Plovers" on **Thursday, Aug. 15, 7 p.m. MDT**. Your BIRD BOMBS host, DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian**, will explore how to ID the seven plover species that visit our state, just as we enter the heart of fall shorebird migration. [Click here to register](#).

Meanwhile, the video of the most recent episode, [BIRD BOMBS: Colorado Bird Taxonomy Made Simple](#), is now available for viewing. In fact, all 28 previous episodes are in the Denver Field Ornithologists' online [BIRD BOMBS video library](#), as well as on [DFO's YouTube channel](#).



COLORADO BAT WATCH ASKS: ANY BATS IN BIRD NESTS?

DFO received a query in July from Colorado Bat Watch, a nonprofit program under [Rocky Mountain](#)

[Wild](#) dedicated to preserving through citizen science the 19 species of bats found in our state. Just now, the group is seeking data about bats using birds' nests as roosting sites, and it wonders if Colorado birders have seen such. "If so, we would love to hear about it," said Colorado Bat Watch's **Samir Sirk Morató**. "CBW is a collaborative effort that depends on reports from citizens to study where (and how many) bats are living in Colorado. This information is crucial to our research and their conservation."

There are various ways to report bat sightings on [the group's website](#). "We'd appreciate any information you're willing

Continued on page 8

to share now or in the future,” Morató added. “Anything reported to us is confidential. If you have any questions about our program, please feel free to ask.” Morató’s email is samir@rockymountainwild.org.

AOS CHECKLIST UPDATE: JUST 1 REDPOLL, AND NIGHT HERONS NO LONGER HYPHENATED

The [American Ornithological Society](https://americanbirding.org/)’s annual mid-summer shuffle of species, taxonomic order, nomenclature and other bird classifications is out. Dozens of changes in North American species (mostly related to genetics) include a few notables among those we encounter in the US and Colorado. Atop the list is the “re-lump” of the three kinds of redpolls as genetically indistinguishable from each other. Henceforth, this winter finch’s Common, Hoary and Lesser species are now one and re-named, simply, Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*).

Several other more common birds get slight name changes to accommodate spinoffs of new species not common in the US. Thus, our House Wren will be Northern House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) and our Barn Owl is now American Barn Owl (*Tyto furcata*). Also, our Cattle Egret becomes Western Cattle-Egret (*Ardea ibis*) and joins the *Ardea* genus of herons, egrets and bitterns. Birders in the West, particularly on the coast, will watch for Siberian Pipit (*Anthus japonicus*), an Asian-breeding subspecies elevated to separate status apart from our American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*). And coastal/tropical birders in the Americas may note the split of the newly named Cocos Booby from the familiar Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*).

An oddly minute tweak that may puzzle is the elimination of the “Night-Heron” hyphen in the names of what will now be Black-crowned Night Heron and Yellow-crowned Night Heron. For a more detailed rundown of the AOS’s new “Check-list Supplement,” go to the American Birding Association’s [“Checklist Redux 2024”](https://americanbirding.org/news/checklist-redux-2024/) article.



SAN LUIS VALLEY SALUTES CRANES, CFO'S COLORADO BIRDING CHALLENGE

A Sandhill Crane figures prominently in a new mural being painted this summer on a building in downtown Alamosa in the San Luis Valley, home of the annual Monte Vista Crane Festival every March. (Contrary to the accompanying photo’s optical illusion, the bird is *not* standing on the artists’ blue stepladder in front of the mural-in-progress.)

The artwork is going up as the valley promotes Colorado Field Ornithologists’ annual Colorado Birding Challenge, which pitting teams of birders across all 64 counties in the state. Some of the donations raised in this year’s competition, set for **12 a.m. to midnight Sept. 14**, will benefit the valley’s Conejos River Restoration Project. The project is an important wetlands habitat, bank stabilization, stream and infrastructure improvement effort along a 4-mile stretch of the largest tributary of the Rio Grande in Colorado.

To register and join in the birding challenge or for more information, visit the challenge page on CFO’s website at <https://cobirds.org/cobc/>.

The mural, meanwhile, is one in a series of 10 wall paintings sponsored by the Alamosa County Chamber of Commerce to mark decades in the valley’s most recent 100 years of history. Read the full story of the murals in the *Valley Courier* newspaper at <https://alamosanews.com/article/alamosa-murals-bring-life-to-downtown>

NATURE FESTIVAL 2024

METZGER FARMSTEAD

August 17th 10-2pm

For all ages and FREE

A celebration of
nature through storytelling,
learning stations, arts and crafts,
and exploring the open space.

For more information visit:
broomfieldopenspacefoundation.org





Nic Korte
Lee Gelatt Photography

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Monday, Aug. 26, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

We've all heard the familiar call to activism for Mother Earth: "Think globally, act locally." Just now, longtime western Colorado wildlife conservationist **Nic Korte** suggests that North American birders put a Western Hemisphere twist to it: Think *tropically*, act locally.

Korte says he'll call us to that in "*No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado*," his DFO evening program set for **Monday, Aug. 26, at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom webinar. "Local actions here affect birds in the tropics," he says. "Some of those birds spend part of their lives in Colorado. (For example), avoiding palm oil in products you buy helps not just the birds whose year-round tropical habitat might be saved, but also birds that live part of the year here in North America."

Indeed, now is when birds so familiar to us as spring migrants and summer nesters are beginning to return south to their neotropical fall and winter haunts in Mexico, Central and South America: Tanagers. Orioles. Grosbeaks. Buntings. Flycatchers. Warblers. Not to mention every Swainson's Hawk on the planet.

The motivation behind his DFO talk "is not to have people 'know' about the issues, but to inspire them to do something," Korte says. He thinks the fact that many of "our" birds spend more of their lives in the neotropics gives us a greater stake in their welfare there.

A 40-year resident of Grand Junction, Korte has been conservation chair of Grand Valley Audubon Society for more than two decades and a board member for nearly three. He leads the society's Western Screech-Owl observation project, with several hundred Grand Valley residents engaged in a community science effort with national status.

But he has also made 30-plus trips to the tropics and even written a book, *Ten Jungle Days* (Outskirts Press), that combines human and natural history, personal memoir and nature discovery travel in the astonishingly diverse Costa Rican rainforest. His encounters there have included exotic amphibians and anteaters, climbing rats, spider monkeys and "the delightful siren call of extraordinary birds."

Growing up on a southern Illinois farm, Korte was interested in birds but stuck in a rural culture more tuned in to traditional "outdoors" pursuits — hunting and fishing. But he wore out the "B" volume of his family's World Book Encyclopedia learning all he could about birds. After graduate school in geochemistry at the University of Arizona, he encountered actual birders for the first time — and found a life's hobby.

Continued on page 11

In 2015, Korte received Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' Richard G. Levad Award for "distinguished service to the ornithological community." In 2019, National Audubon awarded him its William Dutcher Award for "leadership in the birding community of Western Colorado." Follow his birding and conservation blog at <https://birdsandmore.blog/>.



Top:
Red-headed Barbet in Costa Rica
Nic Korte

Bottom:
Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in Costa Rica
Nic Korte

DFO VOLUNTEERISM

Ready to pitch in for DFO? Come volunteer

Volunteers make DFO run. And who are they? People like YOU.

Denver Field Ornithologists functions thanks to people who have stepped forward to ask: How can I help? We've got a few answers below, but DFO is open to volunteer service in whatever way you think you can help.

As an all-volunteer organization, DFO exists only because people like you offer your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. Whether it's a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless assets.

Here are some priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com for more details. And if you're got a talent or skill that you think DFO can use, let Phil know that, too, won't you?

Technical Communications Adviser:

DFO needs a member with "techie" background, and knowledge and interest in online streaming and event recording (audio-video), to help present programs and conduct meetings and webinars

Social Media Poster (Communications & Outreach Committee):

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO's Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms, your role could be intermittent, on an as-needed basis. We also seek expertise in helping DFO develop a strategic plan for our social media communications

Assistant Programs Manager:

Working with DFO Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, this volunteer helps develop and arrange DFO's monthly evening programs in spring and fall, and helps write and post notices, articles and links to promote these Zoom-based presentations on our social media and in our newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*

Field Trip Leader:

Field trips are DFO's signature club activity, and the Field Trips Committee is always looking to add more trip leaders to the team. Experienced birders who are familiar with DFO field trips and have experience or ability to lead people in small group activities are a plus, but anyone interested can ask for more details

Newsletter Assistant:

You'll help compile and write short items and "blurbs" about DFO events, programs, club news and people for *The Lark Bunting*, our periodic newsletter. Basic writing ability is a plus, but your interest and ideas about what to write and show are a double-plus



Ted Floyd
© Abby Santurbane Photography

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9

Ted Floyd
Monday, Sept. 23, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

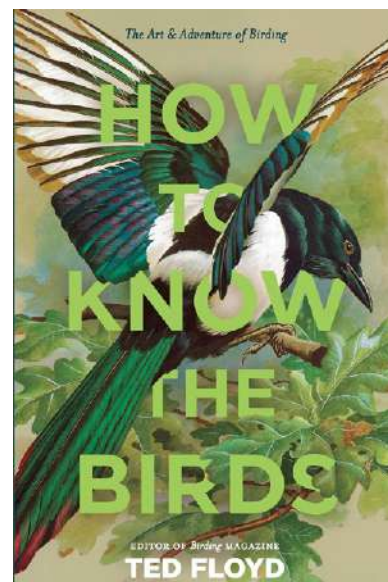
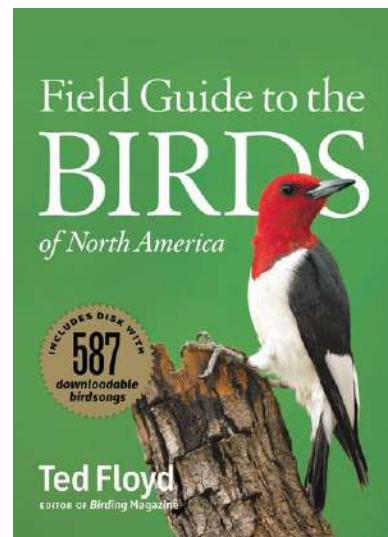
The world of birding is changing fast. eBird and the Merlin Bird ID app continue to alter the way we bird. Cornell Lab's [Macaulay Library](#) delivers terabytes of amazing bird media to the whole world. Top-line optics maker Swarovski has even launched a "smart" binocular that actually works. Meanwhile, the [American Ornithological Society](#) has begun the process of renaming some of the most familiar birds in Colorado and beyond, with plenty of controversy swirling around it. (AOS's "Summit for the Birds" annual meeting this fall, in Estes Park, will feature a public forum on that topic.)

What to make of it all? Our "man on the inside" — distinguished Colorado guidebook author, avian journalist and birding free thinker **Ted Floyd** — will discuss the latest in new knowledge, new tech, new names, and, ultimately, new ways of engaging and appreciating the bird world . . . at least as of September 2024. Hence, the title of his DFO evening program, "*The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9*," on **Monday, Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. And yes: Ted says you can expect it to all change again pretty soon thereafter.

Floyd, who last spoke to DFO almost exactly two years to the day before this presentation, is longtime editor of *Birding* magazine, flagship publication of the [American Birding Association](#). Engaging and energetic, he has written five bird books — including the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (HarperCollins, 2008) and *How to Know the Birds* (National Geographic, 2019) — and he has three more on the way. He has also written more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. He is a frequent speaker at bird festivals, club meetings, and ornithological conferences.

Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, applying new media and emerging technologies toward the appreciation of nature, and interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners. He regularly leads popular field trips in and around Boulder County, where he and his family live in Lafayette.

Ted has served on the boards of Western Field Ornithologists and Colorado Field Ornithologists. He holds a Ph.D. in ecology from Penn State University and has taught biology, math, and statistics to everyone from second graders to advanced graduate students. He is a recent recipient (2022) of the ABA's Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service, and he is a frequent guest on the American Birding podcast. He is a prolific content generator for ABA's online platforms and is especially proud of his involvement in the association's Young Birder programs.





Matthew Young with Redpolls
Melissa Groo

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*

Matthew A. Young
Monday, Oct. 28, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

What makes a finch a finch? A heavy, conical bill meant for cracking open seeds, right? Not so fast, says **Matthew A. Young**, one of the nation's foremost researchers into the finch branches of the avian family tree. It's more complicated than that. Remember Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands? Turns out they're actually tanagers.

Bill size and shape are "no longer the case with taxonomy," says Young, president and founder of the [Finch Research Network](#) and an expert in the many calls of the Red Crossbill, another finch family member. Young will discuss all this and more in DFO's October evening program, "Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*," scheduled for **Oct. 28 at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom** webinar

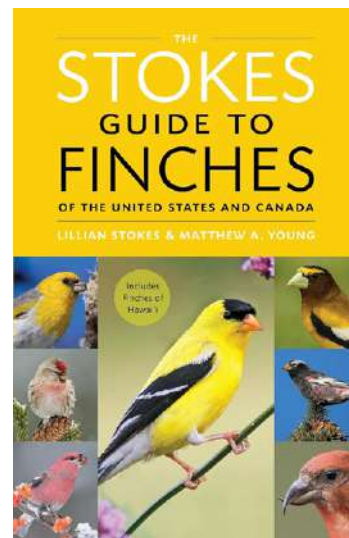
Young is co-author of that new *Stokes* guide, due out in mid-September. "There is no guide to finches for the United States, if you can believe it," he notes. He's also the audio engineer behind much of the bird call and song recordings for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin Bird ID app. He has worked for Cornell on and off for 15 years of an eclectic career that also includes extensive (and current) employment as a social worker with special-needs adolescents and young adults.

He also works with the Rosy Finch Working Group, which he says "is looking into how climate change may play a big role in the future of rosy finches." And he is co-leader of the International Evening Grosbeak Working Group, which is "trying to figure out what led to a 92% decline" in the species in the past 50 years.

Atop all that, Young also studies bogs, fens and orchids. (He founded and is president of the Native Orchid Conservation Network.)

Young has observed and enjoyed nature since early childhood. He first marveled at finches after moving to Yellowstone NP for a summer host job at a park hotel. As he stood at the iconic Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River, "a flock of birds flew in above me and started feeding. It was Red Crossbills. It was the spark — not a spark bird, but a moment in life that shifted my whole being."

He earned his bachelor's degree in water resources and master's in ornithology at two branches of SUNY, the State University of New York. He currently teaches an introductory birding class at Cornell. He was also an adjunct professor in environmental studies at SUNY-Cortland, and he has served as board chair of The Wetland Trust. Young was a regional editor for 10 years with *The Kingbird*, quarterly journal of the New York Ornithological Society.



DFO thanks trip leaders with bird walk, box lunches, books

Patrick O'Driscoll

About 20 field trip leaders became participants for the day on July 27 as DFO's Field Trips Committee thanked the volunteers who guide birders on our club's many field outings.

The day opened with a leisurely 2½-hour birding loop up to and around the summit at Genesee Mountain Park in Jefferson County. Led by DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian**, the optional outing coaxed 28 species out of the surrounding Ponderosa pines on a quiet, cloudless morning above Denver's July heat and haze. The 14 birders encountered no rarities, but sharp eyes and ears spotted Olive-sided Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak and Green-tailed Towhee among scads of Violet-green Swallows, Western Wood-Pewees, Pygmy Nuthatches, Western Bluebirds and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds.

After the field trippers returned to the park's group picnic area, several more later-arriving leaders joined the gathering for box lunches from Firehouse Subs Catering, plus salad, cold drinks and a bowl of Suddjian's own "green gold" guacamole roughly the size of a magpie nest.

After lunch, Suddjian thanked the assembled volunteers (and the rest who could not attend) for making DFO's program of free field trips such an enduring success. Ever the statistician, he noted that 37 different trip leaders have led at least one trip in 2024, and that the club had already led nearly 150 field trips through July. The species count list had reached 355 species, with 290 of them in 44 Colorado counties visited so far this year. Those species were all recorded in a total of 910 eBird checklists.

"A recent DFO membership survey identified our field trips as the most appreciated offering that DFO has," Suddjian added. "This is thanks entirely to our great team of leaders. You each have places you like to visit on field trips, and you each have your own style and gifts for leading, helping to make our program rich and successful."



Box lunches for trip leaders at Genesee Mountain's group picnic area David Suddjian

Continued on page 15

He also noted that the club's new "Birds Plus+" feature on some trips is proving popular so far with participants. These outings blend a regular birding trip with field lessons in a related topic, sometimes with guest-expert coleaders. Birds Plus+ subjects have focused on or will feature wildflowers, trees, butterflies, reptiles and other wildlife along the trail, as well as birding-adjacent pursuits like photography, natural history, geology, nature journaling, native gardening, and more.

Attendees also had their pick of "door prizes" when DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** and trip leader and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** brought dozens of free books on birds and birding. The giveaway volumes, which ranged from field guides and species handbooks to coffee-table picture books and breeding bird surveys, were among hundreds donated recently to the club by longtime members **John Breitsch** and **Barry Knapp**.



Pre-lunch field trip rambled around
Genesee Mountain's Ponderosa pine forest
Patrick O'Driscoll



Attendees took away free bird
books donated by members
Patrick O'Driscoll



David Suddjian thanks
field trip leaders
Patrick O'Driscoll



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

500 and counting: reflections on DFO field trips I've led (so far)

David Suddjian

About a month ago, on the July 4 holiday, I led my 500th field trip for Denver Field Ornithologists. As the years and months have unfolded since my first as a trip leader (Oct. 4, 2016, Chatfield State Park in Jefferson and Douglas counties), I've become ever more passionate about leading DFO outings. For me, nothing beats sharing what I know about birds and birding, and enabling birders on my trips to have great experiences in the field.

I was excited as the 500-trip milestone approached. Keeping track these past 8 years was easy thanks to DFO's website, designed expertly by webmaster (and veteran Iowa birder) **Ann Johnson**. Fittingly, trip No. 500 marked a return to where I started: Chatfield SP, this time on one of its busiest days of the year.

Our group slipped through the gate early before the Independence Day crowd jammed inside to capacity. Immersed in birdsong that morning as we hiked along the South Platte River above Kingfisher Bridge, we encountered American Redstarts, Yellow-breasted Chats, Gray Catbirds, goldfinches and hummingbirds. It was a promising start to a red-letter day.

Before moving to Colorado in 2013, I had led hundreds of birding trips over many years in my native California. Most were for the Santa Cruz Bird Club, various Audubon chapters and birding festivals. After arriving in Colorado, I joined DFO but wasn't really active until 2016, when I saw there was an opening on the DFO Board of Directors.

Thinking I might be able to contribute, I met with the late **Joe Roller**, then DFO president, to discuss getting involved. Joe encouraged me to lead field trips again by getting certified. That process of learning and following DFO field trip standards and practices ensures that participants are signing up for quality outings. After orientation with **Karen von Saltza**, longtime chair of the Field Trip Committee, I was on the DFO calendar for October 2016 – first the Chatfield trip, and then one up into Park County, already my favorite birding area.

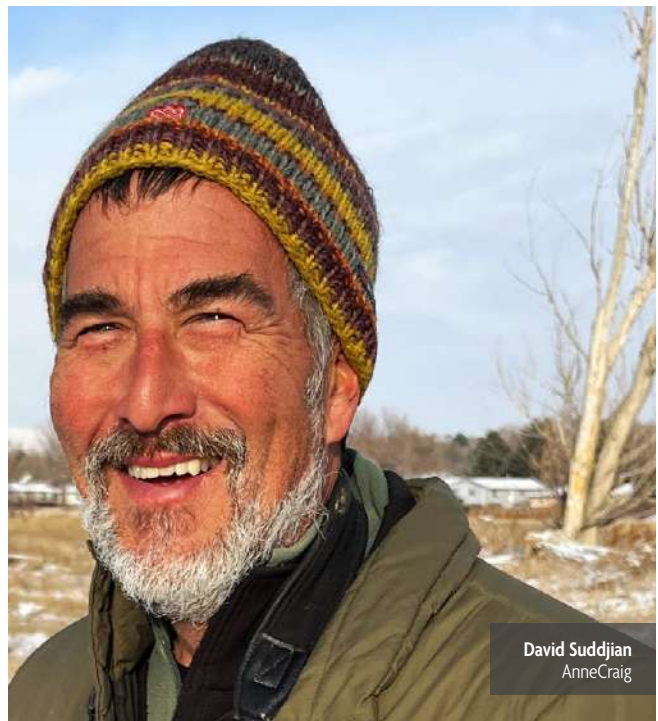
Although some of my early trips were not well-attended (one had zero signups!), I kept at it. The following year, Joe encouraged me to coordinate a field trip "Big Year" for our club, an all-out quest for as many species as our trips could find in 2018. It was a resounding success: a club record 361 species in Colorado in a

single year. I led 81 of our many field trips myself. Although a year later we were stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020–May 2021), our field trip program continued to grow.

In August 2021, Karen retired and I became Field Trips chair, leading and co-leading almost weekly ever since. (And before I forget: Thanks to the many leaders with whom I have shared co-leading duty, most especially **Diane Roberts**, **Dale Pate** and **Anne Craig**.)

Overseeing the field trip program is work, but the behind-the-scenes functionality Ann Johnson built into our webpages makes it easy to create field trips, register and communicate with participants, and record trip results. All for hundreds of outings a year open to anyone, and most of them for free.

Looking back at my "first" 500 field trips, I see numerous adventures to new and old favorite birding destinations all over Colorado. Especially memorable are overnights to all corners of the state — birding hotspots in all 64 counties, the last four during a 1,300-mile, six-day ramble through southwestern Colorado last May.



David Suddjian
Anne Craig

Continued on page 17



Suddjian (third from left) with field trippers at Chatfield SP during his 500th trip as leader
Linda Purcell

It's impossible to summarize the hundreds of great birds on thousands of eBird checklists in my almost 8 years at this. But I've got some favorites: Rare visitors like Mexican Whip-Poorwill, White Ibis, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Pink-footed Goose, and Pyrrhuloxia. Sought-after Colorado species like Lucy's and Grace's warblers, Black-throated Sparrow, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Gunnison Sage Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse. Plus Black Swift, Black Rail, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Painted Bunting, Scott's Oriole, Flammulated Owl, rosy-finches, longspurs, and so many others.

The birds fuel my passion, of course — but so to the people I lead into the field. So many wonderful and interesting birders sign up for our trips, many of them now my friends. Trip participants' sharp eyes and ears make every outing much better than if I'd gone birding alone.

And what variety! Many trips include people on their first DFO outing, or even their first birding walk ever. Alongside them are "frequent fliers" — birders who have been on 25, 50, even 100 or more trips. It's a joy to see everyone's birding skills and knowledge grow. I'm humbled by their compliments and reviews — and I am as grateful back to them that I can be an informal mentor in our shared passion.

I would never have visited every corner of the state by now without DFO field trips (and trip participants) spurring me on. But I think my favorites are the repeated local outings to special spots near my home in Jefferson County's Ken Caryl Valley. We've gone out more than two dozen times to find Common Poorwills at dusk amidst the Ken Caryl hogbacks. More than 70 birders have had "life list" encounters with Northern Saw-whet Owls near my house. We've even birded in my actual backyard, including "summer hummer" outings for Calliope and Rufous hummingbirds. I love leading spring and summer hikes into the private Ken Caryl Foothills Open Space for quiet, simple immersion in nature. And I'll never forget the amazement on their faces at hundreds of White-throated Swifts flocking into a fall migration roost above nearby Deer Creek.

If you have enjoyed and learned from my field trips, I'm grateful. If you haven't yet come out with me, sign up for one of my trips soon. I look forward to birding together with you.

David Suddjian came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Besides leading half-a-thousand field trips, he organized the club's 2018 "Big Year" and created DFO's popular "BIRD BOMBS" series of mini-webinars on bird ID. He received DFO's inaugural Peregrine Award in 2023 for field trip innovations.



Pausing on trail in Aurora's Ponderosa Preserve
Anne Craig

DAVID IN THE FIELD: BY THE NUMBERS

511

DFO field trips led/co-
led through July 2024

857

Different individual
people on first 500 trips

64

Colorado counties
visited (all of them)

374

In-state species
checklisted

148

Most trips led in a year
(2023)

22

Overnight
trips led

6+1300

Days and miles of single
longest trip led (2024)

Our annual honor roll of milestone DFO'ers

Did you know the Denver Field Ornithologists website keeps tabs on how long you've been a member? Our "Membership Longevity" webpage displays, year by year, the enduring membership of everyone who's been in DFO 10 years or more.

Last year, *The Lark Bunting* first celebrated veteran DFO'ers' commitment to the club with this "longevity roll" of milestone anniversary years for club members, from 10 years and up in 5-year intervals. This year's annual shout-out includes 26 members who mark milestone anniversaries this year. (If you're a member, you can look at where you and your friends are in the longevity list by logging in and clicking the "Members Only" link in the drop-down menu on the dfobirds.org home page.)

Here's the honor roll for 2024. Look for the 2025 list of longevity milestones in *The Lark Bunting* this time next year.

40 YEARS (1984)

Richard Maslow, Denver

30 YEARS (1994)

Grace Hahn, Wheat Ridge; **Larry Modesitt**, Arvada, and **Rod Webb**, Denver

25 YEARS (1999)

Scott Blackard, Centennial, and **Pat Joy**, Boulder

20 YEARS (2004)

Cris Cook, Littleton, and **Donna Levene**, Denver

15 YEARS (2009)

Bill Buttner, Golden; **Rick Creswell**, Lakewood; **Kate Frost**, Centennial; **John Harrington**, Littleton, and **Peggy Wait**, Littleton

10 YEARS (2014)

Tom Behnfield, Lakewood; **Susan Blansett**, Golden; **Roberta Chase**, Englewood; **John Dwyer**, Englewood; **Michael Fernandez**, Denver; **A.J. Gest**, Aurora; **Chris Gilbert**, Castle Pines; **Patrick O'Driscoll**, Denver; **Robert Raker**, Lakewood; **David Suddjian**, Littleton; **Fred Wamboldt**, Denver; **Bea Weaver**, Littleton, and **Jeremy Winick**, Westminster

Welcome to new DFO members

Shari Frazier, Arvada; **Catherine Millard**, Aurora; **Cathy** and **Bob Rolland**, Denver, **Terry, Janet** and **R. Scott Silvester**, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Sharon Hines

Friends of DFO

Jim Esten

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

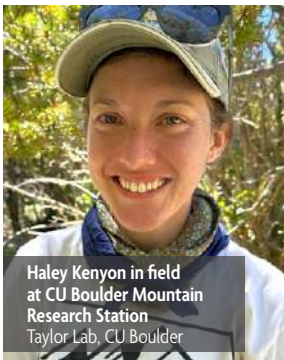
Kenneth Arroyo and **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo**, in memory of **Charlie Wall**; **Steve Hebert**, in memory of Charlie Wall



Mexican Jay
Linda Cunico

DFO grantee report: How an eyebrow can affect aggression among Colorado chickadees

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Recipients of grants from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education & Conservation Fund are asked to report to club members on their work with a program talk, a field trip, or an article in The Lark Bunting. **Hailey L. Kenyon**, a post-doctoral associate in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at CU Boulder, chose the third option. This article is about her 2023-funded grant project, "The effects of color pattern differences on between-species aggressive interactions in a Colorado Front Range avian hybrid zone" (with co-investigator **Scott A. Taylor**).*



Hailey Kenyon

The striking variety of color among birds has long inspired our appreciation for the natural world and has informed our understanding of avian biodiversity. Color pattern differences between closely related bird species are often key field marks for

ornithologists and recreational birders, allowing us to tell species of similar size and shape apart from each other.

Such physical differences are also thought to be important for species recognition among the birds themselves. They can enable individuals to identify members of their own kind and avoid fights and other costly interactions with other species.

During the 2023 breeding season, with support from a \$1,950 DFO Research, Education & Conservation grant, I studied how color differences in our two Colorado chickadee species influence aggressive interactions between them. I did this work alongside my colleagues from the Taylor Lab at CU Boulder as part of the ongoing [Boulder Chickadee Study](#).

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) are both found in the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies. Black-capped tends to live at lower elevations in mixed forests, while Mountain is more common at higher elevations in coniferous forests. But the two species' ranges overlap significantly, and they sometimes breed in adjacent territories. While similar in many ways, they exhibit strikingly different color patterns. Mountain Chickadees have a bright white eyebrow stripe or *supercilium*, a feature absent from the uniformly black cap of Black-capped Chickadees.

To examine how these differences influence aggressive interactions between the species, I painted 3D-printed chickadee models to match exactly each species' color patterns. I placed paired models of the two into breeding territories of Black-capped males to simulate other bird intruders. Then I observed and counted the physical attacks each territorial male made on the different models. As this experiment was in Boulder County, where both species coexist, the Black-capped males would be familiar with the Mountain Chickadee as a different species.

The real birds treated the models as real intruders and rival breeders against whom they needed to defend their territories. But the territorial males were more aggressive against their own kind, the Black-capped models, than against those painted like Mountain Chickadees.

This suggested that the color differences are important for species recognition in aggressive encounters. It also appears that the visual difference created primarily by the Mountain Chickadee's striking white eyebrow may help that species avoid aggression from Black-capped Chickadees during breeding season. These differences, however, may only be meaningful to birds familiar with other chickadee species. When I previously conducted the same experiments in Ontario, Canada, where no Mountain Chickadees are found, Black-capped Chickadee males were equally aggressive towards models of both species.

I am very grateful to Denver Field Ornithologists for supporting this field experiment, which provides key insights into interactions among Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees in our unique Front Range contact zone.

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The next stage in my research will study the influence of birds' genetic background on aggressive responses and examine how color pattern differences might mediate other types of interactions between Colorado's two chickadee species. To read more about my previous and ongoing research, visit my website at <https://haleykenyon.wordpress.com/>.



Male Black-capped Chickadee, center, landing between dummy birds in aggression trial
Taylor Lab, CU Boulder



Haley Kenyon with chickadee
Taylor Lab, CU Boulder



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

Summer DFO trips (25!) *In Focus*

DFO led a total of 42 field trips in June and July 2024. Of those, participants took and shared pictures of “birders birding” on 25 trips. If you’re on DFO trips in August, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the October issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out in September. We’ll choose one for each trip. Birders-in-action shots are preferred, but posed group pictures are acceptable.

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any details (e.g., what bird they were looking at) to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month — in this case, Saturday, Aug. 31.

JUNE 3

Ken Caryl Valley area (Jefferson County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Melody Serra, John Batt, Lori Morton, Phil Waltz,
Cynthia Breidenbach, Ryan Corda, Eileen Warner

Surrounded by hillside flowers on DFO field trip June 3 through
private Foothills Open Space of Ken Caryl Ranch
(David Suddjian)



JUNE 9

Deer Creek Canyon area (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Jason Bidgood, Gigi Zarzuela, Timothy Condon,
Ryan Corda, Rajkumar Manikandan, Judy McKeon

June 9 field trip from upper Deer Creek watershed
to the hogbacks had a 64-species checklist
(Gigi Zarzuela)

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JUNE 10
**Deer Creek Canyon
Open Space Park
(Jefferson)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Melody Serra, Shay Lyons, Judy Lane,
Oliver Urdiales, Melissa Wetzig, Phil Waltz

Deer Creek Canyon Park birders in
total focus on June 10 field trip
(David Suddjian)



JUNE 12
**South-central Colorado
(Huerfano, Las Animas)**

Leaders
Linda Purcell and David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Jennifer and Robert Tonge,
Judy McKeon, Kenneth Stuckey, Debby Miller,
Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Sara and Luke Jaramillo,
Dave Prentice

Scenic pause during June 12 trip to Huerfano
and Las Animas counties in south-central Colorado
(Judy McKeon)



JUNE 13
**Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area
(Summit)**

Leaders
Paul Slingsby and Chris Blakeslee

Participants
Luke and Sara Jaramillo, Mark Amershek,
Laura Hollenbaugh, Chuck Hundertmark

June 13 field trippers at meadow's edge in
Alfred M. Bailey Nesting Area in Summit County
(Mark Amershek)



Continued on page 23

JUNE 15

Pawnee National Grasslands (Weld)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Winston Liu, Kenneth Stuckey, Matthew Hazelgren,
Linda Klumpers, Mark Wallace, Luke Jaramillo

All lenses focus on Chestnut-collared Longspurs
during June 15 field trip to Pawnee National Grasslands.

From distant rear left are Matthew, Luke, Linda,
Mark, Winston, and Ken
(Jason B. Bidgood)



JUNE 15

Lair o' the Bear Park (Jefferson)

Leader

Gigi Zarzuela

Participants

Lynn Slaga, David Suddjian, Jackson Strobel,
Ryan Corda, Martha Strickland, Scott Hammel

All eyes up and on birds during Lair o' the Bear Park
field trip on June 15
(David Suddjian)



JUNE 15

Ken Caryl poorwill evening (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Sonjia Enck, Shari and Claire Frazier,
Vicky Hamilton, Bill Buttner, Marie Mager,
Bonnie Prado

Dusk paints the skies above Ken Caryl Valley June 15
as field trippers pursue Common Poorwills
(Scott Hammel)



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JUNE 22
Ken Caryl Valley area
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Susanna Donato, Lynn Slaga, Dee Patterson,
Steve Patterson, Becky Russell

All eyes focus on a Virginia's Warbler in the brush
on June 22 field trip to Ken Caryl Ranch Foothills
Open Space in Jefferson County
(David Suddjian)

JUNE 23
Hall Ranch Open Space
(Boulder)

Leaders
Courtney Rella and Jessica Goldstrohm

Participants
R. Scott Silvester, Mary and Charlie Saunders, John Batt,
Jason Bidgood, Jackie Jazo, Winston Liu, Janet and Terry Silvester

Birders on the trail during June 23 "Birds Plus+ Pollinators"
field trip to Hall Ranch in Boulder County
(Jason B. Bidgood)



JUNE 27
Reynolds Park Open Space
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Katherine Peterson, Ryan Corda, Andrea Duran,
Kathy Holland, Luke Jaramillo, Christopher Curwen,
Kris Saucke

Field trippers pose trailside on June 27 outing
to Reynolds Park Open Space
David Suddjian



Continued on page 25

JUNE 30
**Prospect Park
(Jefferson)**

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Caroline Armstrong, Christina Jeske, Lisa Seiler, Lynn Slaga,
Matthew Hazelgren, Morgan Kahle, Nadiyah Watts.,
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Cat Phanthamany, Scott Levine

Zeroing in on a Black-chinned Hummingbird during June 30
trip in Prospect Park and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Gigi Zarzuela)



JULY 1
**Teller Lakes
(Boulder)**

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Gigi Zarzuela, David Suddjian, Christie Owens, Eric Perryman,
Marie Mager, Ryan Corda, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lori Potter,
Luke Jaramillo, and Sara Jaramillo.

Field trippers focus on a Dickcissel during
July 1 trip to Teller Lakes in Boulder County
(Gigi Zarzuela)



JULY 4
**Chatfield SP upstream of Kingfisher Bridge
(Jefferson)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
John Batt, Ryan Corda, Mark Wallace, Winston Liu, Gigi Zarzuela,
Linda Purcell, Melody Serra, Lisa Forte, Virginia Gulakowski, Nancy Donovan

Field trippers on July 4 Chatfield SP outing mark 500th DFO trip
led by David Suddjian with a tailgate mini-potluck
(David Suddjian)



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JULY 9

Deer Creek Canyon Open Space Park (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Stephen Suddjian, Judy McKeon, Linda Purcell,
Beth Harkins, Leanne McDorman, Michelle Verostko,
Bonnie Prado, Todd Maston

Birders scan along Meadowlark Trail on July 9 outing in
Deer Creek Canyon Open Space Park
(Bonnie Prado)



JULY 11

Roxborough SP (Douglas)

Leader

Bea Weaver

Participants

Thomas Forre, Debbie Fox, Chip Dawes,
Robert George, Mark Wallace, Joe Chen,
Virginia Gulakowski, Tom Mottinger

Birders scan hogback horizon at Roxborough SP
on July 11 field trip
(Joe Chen)



JULY 14

Rocky Mountain NP (Boulder/Larimer)

Leader

Donna Stumpp

Participants

Edie Israel, John Batt, Matthew Hazelgren,
Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Joe Chen, Mark Wallace

Field trippers trek through wildfire burn area
July 14 in Rocky Mountain NP
(Joe Chen)



Continued on page 27

JULY 15
**Park County explorations
(Park)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Bonnie Prado, Steve Hebert, Mike Gaylord,
Phil Waltz, Dave Prentice, Gigi Zarzuela,
Dee Patterson, John Batt, Luke Jaramillo

**Alpine field trippers scan tundra
on July 15 Park County outing**
(David Suddjian)



JULY 18
**Beaver Ranch Park
(Jefferson)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Gigi Zarzuela,
Kris Saucke, Sharon Kelly,
Robin Trevillian, Bob Rolland,
Kevin and Catherine Millard

**Zeroing in on Evening Grosbeaks on
July 18 field trip to Beaver Ranch Park**
(David Suddjian)



JULY 20
**Ken Caryl Valley area
(Jefferson)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Marjorie Middleton, Kelly Johnson,
Steven Esrey, Joe Chen, Kerri Kunkel

**Field trippers on early morning outing July 20
around Ken Caryl Valley area**
(Joe Chen)



Continued on page 28

JULY 27
Genesee Mountain Park
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Gigi Zarzuela, Patrick O'Driscoll, Chuck Hundertmark, Mary Keithler,
Liza and Ajit Antony, Gary Witt, Trace Turner, Carly Crow, Amanda Baker,
Dale Pate, Sharon Tinianow, Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg

Ajit Antony spots a bird during DFO field trip leader appreciation day birding walk
July 27 at Genesee Mountain Park
(David Suddjian)



JULY 28
Barr Lake SP – Birds Plus+
(Adams)

Leader
Carly Crow

Participants
Catherine Millard, Cheryl Ames,
Cindi Inklebarger, Debra Lentz

Participants in Barr Lake SP Birds Plus+
nature journaling field trip show their work
(Carly Crow)

JULY 28
Prospect Park
(Jefferson)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Dwight Stuessy,
Christina Jeske, Stephanie Velotta, Lisa Seiler,
Mary Ramsey, Scott Levine, Nadiyah Watts,
Alejandra Doucette-Brayer

Admiring a family of Northern Flicker on July 28 during
monthly trip to Prospect Lake and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Gigi Zarzuela)



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JULY 30
**Mount Blue Sky +
MBS Scenic Byway**
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Jennifer and Robert Tonge,
Linda Purcell, Judy McKeon, Mark Wallace,
Melody Serra, Dee and Steve Patterson,
Debby Miller, Sara Jaramillo

Field trippers stop at Cloudland picnic area along
route of Birds Plus+ tree ID field trip July 30 between
Genesee and Mount Blue Sky
(Jennifer Tonge)



JULY 31
Sharptail Ridge Open Space
(Douglas)(Adams)

Leader
Dale Pate

Participants
David Suddjian, Karli Rose, Lorraine Dixon-
Jones, Becky Russell, Sharon Kelly, Ann
Christensen, Gregg Goodrich

Setting out on very birdy start to Sharptail Ridge
Open Space field trip July 31
(David Suddjian)

CONSERVATION

Enhancing, restoring ecology of Denver's parks, lakes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Just before the Fourth of July, six floating squares — each strung with fluttering pink flags above and sprouting clumps of vegetation below — suddenly appeared on the surface of Duck Lake in Denver City Park.

Holiday parade floats? An art installation? Nesting platforms for waterbirds? Actually, none of the above . . . although theoretically, that third suggestion could perhaps come to pass one day.

Denver Parks & Recreation calls them “floating wetlands,” each several feet square and implanted with about 3 dozen plugs of marshland grasses, rushes and sedges. They are a new demonstration project in the department's ambitious plan to improve the lake's water quality and rehab and restore its longstanding rookery island where Double-crested Cormorants produce and fledge scores of young each spring and summer.

What's underway at Duck Lake is part of a broader ecological effort across Denver's parks. In projects large and small, Parks & Rec aims to upgrade park lakes and habitat and enrich park environments with more native plantings to benefit birds, pollinators, other wildlife and human enjoyment of the parks.

We'll tell you more about these projects — and what they may mean for birds in Denver — in next month's issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Sign at Grasmere Lake in Washington Park notes habitat improvements
Sharon Tinianow



As cottonwoods die on cormorant island in Denver City Park's Duck Lake, invasive vegetation takes over
Patrick O'Driscoll



Floating wetlands provide habitat, filter water to improve ecology at Denver City Park's Duck Lake
Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Road ode: DFO rerun to Arizona “Sky Islands” succeeds despite 4-wheel challenges

THE TRIP: SE Arizona Sky Islands / CO, AZ, NM
DATES: Wednesday, May 15 – Sunday, May 26
LEADER: Joey Kellner + 7 participants
SPECIES: 193 on 84 eBird checklists
(<https://ebird.org/tripreport/231374>)

Elf Owl near entrance to Miller Canyon
Linda Cunico

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Joey Kellner

Every DFO field trip is an adventure — and this year's May 15-26 repeat of our 2023 ramble through the "Sky Islands" of southeastern Arizona became an unexpected encounter of the 4-wheeled kind.

Late one morning, our eight-member band of birders turned road crew to get our vehicles up a hole-pocked canyon route. Two days later, the team worked to dislodge one of our rental minivans off a "high-center" obstacle. Still later, when the second minivan broke down, we coasted miles down a winding road, then got out to push the last mile to our overnight stop. (The rental car company eventually brought us a replacement.)

Despite the roadside detours, we missed no birds or birding opportunities. In fact, our 193 species were two more than on last year's epic trip. We submitted photos or recordings of almost half the species (94) on our 84 eBird checklists, and our eBird trip report (<https://ebird.org/tripreport/231374>) includes many of those photos. Besides me as leader, our team included **Ajit** and **Liza Antony**, **Alison Bishop**, **Linda Cunico**, **Chris Curwen**, **Peggy Gonder**, and **Mary Fran O'Connor**.

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Elegant Trogon
Linda Cunico



Ash-throated Flycatcher
Linda Cunico

As last year, our principal destinations were the bird-rich Madrean Sky Islands (named after [Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental](#) mountain range that reaches up into Arizona and New Mexico). These locations are the incredibly biodiverse tops of isolated peaks that rise from the floor of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts and Great Plains grasslands. Their wooded uplands and summits are alive with plant, animal and birdlife common in Mexico but found almost nowhere else in the US — 7,000 species of plants and wildlife in all, including more than half the bird species in North America.

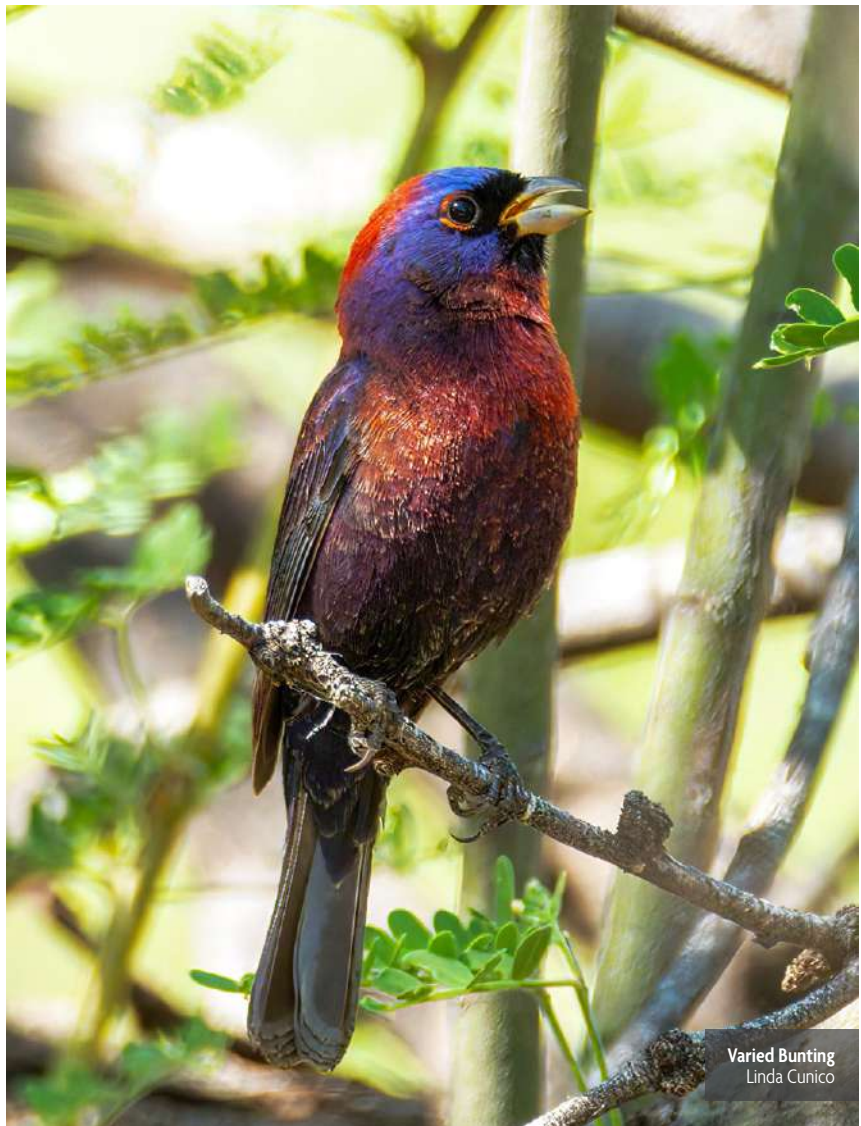
This year, due to timing and scheduling of other birding groups in the same remote area, we routed our itinerary in the reverse order of the 2023 excursion. But we found almost all of the specialty birds we were after, including four local hawk species (Common Black-Hawk and Zone-tailed, Gray, and Harris's hawks), Crested Caracara, Black and Turkey vultures, 11 species of hummingbirds, three kinds of nightjar, 19 flycatcher species, five different vireos and many more. Most importantly, we again got the Sky Islands bird everyone wanted to see, the one Tucson Audubon calls “the most sought-after bird in Arizona” — [Elegant Trogon](#)!

Like almost any bird outing, not all the species were where we expected them to be. But with backup locations in my back pocket, we tracked down elusive White-eared and Lucifer's hummingbirds, and spent a special evening with a vocal Elf Owl, the world's smallest. It's an adorable nester in cavities from Saguaro cactus in the desert to broadleaf trees and conifers in canyons, riparian corridors and forests higher up.

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DFO's Sky Islands crew in grasslands near the Santa Rita Mountains
Allison Bishop



Varied Bunting
Linda Cunico

Although we won't forget the classic birding moments, the team's resourcefulness and sweat in getting across, over and around those transportation obstacles made vivid memories, too. The road-building episode on May 22 found us near the top of rough, rocky Carr Canyon Road. Blocking the way were several holes so deep we had to hand-fill them with roadside rubble to continue our climb. The rewards were a fine picnic spot and great looks at Buff-bellied Flycatcher and Greater Pewee.

The second obstacle, on May 24 near the Southwest Research Station, was a huge rock that left one of our minivans high-centered, helpless as a turtle on its back. Out came a tire-change jack and a garden spade, and after vigorous wrestling with the vehicle, we were off the rock and on our way again.

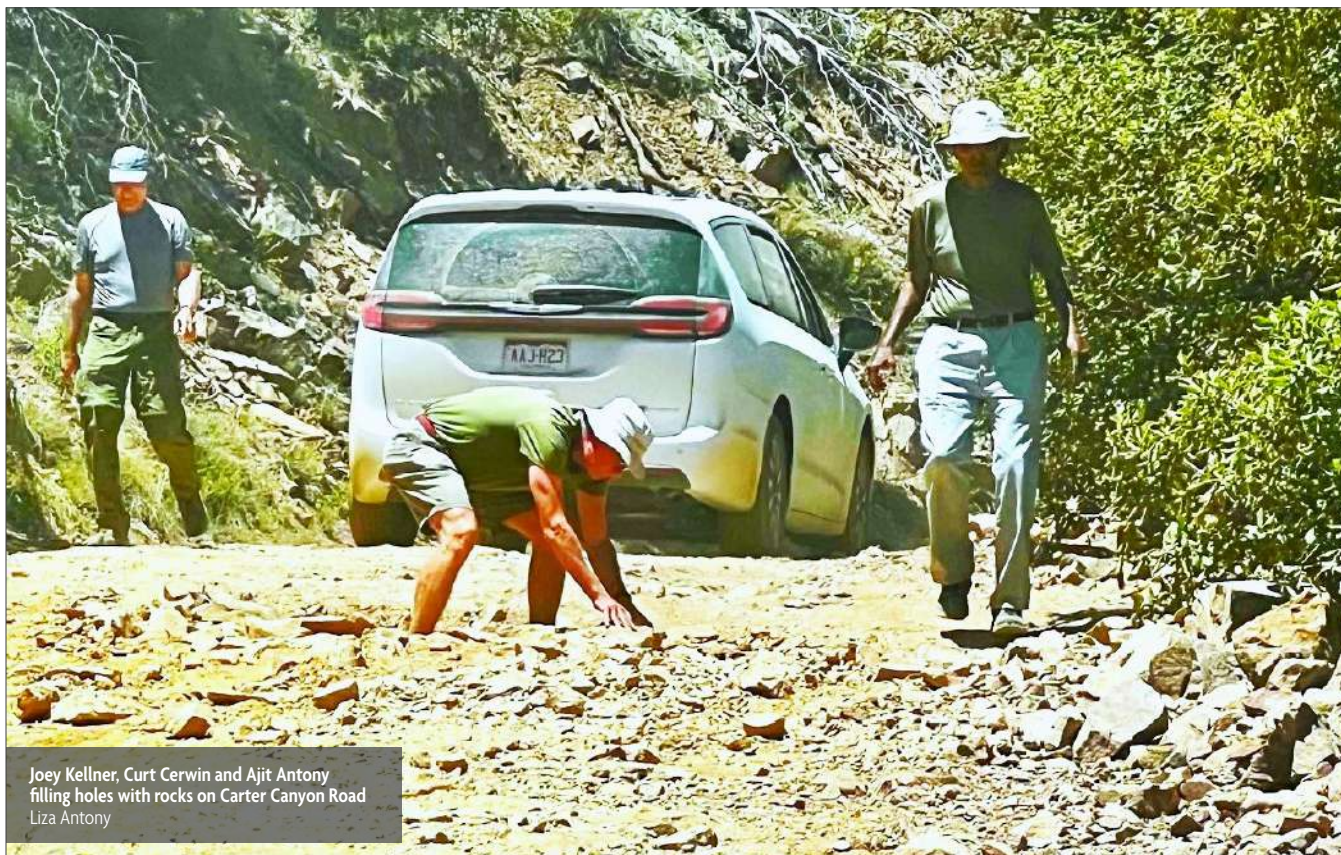
The downhill coast came later the same day in the Chiricahua Mountains, after "CHECK ENGINE" and "BATTERY" lights lit up in the other minivan. Then a more ominous dashboard warning: "PULL OVER / THE VEHICLE IS SHUTTING DOWN." After failed attempts to restart, we slipped the transmission into neutral and gravity took us 7 miles down winding dirt and then paved roads. When we stopped rolling about a mile from our night's destination, we pushed the vehicle over a small hill for a final coast to the lodge. Dinner never tasted so good!

Thank you as well to all the participants for their early morning promptness and especially their patience when our target birds did not always appear on cue. If we can pull off an adventure with travel challenges like this, I foresee more DFO expeditions to this singular setting of superb, border country birding.



Zone-tailed Hawk
Linda Cunico

Continued on page 34



Joey Kellner, Curt Cerwin and Ajit Antony
filling holes with rocks on Carter Canyon Road
Liza Antony



Hepatic Tanager
Linda Cunico

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Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher
Linda Cunico



Chihuahuan Meadowlark,
newly split species
Linda Cunico



Blue-throated Mountain-gem
Linda Cunico



Pushing the disabled minivan
in the Chiricahuas
Allison Bishop

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY FALL MIGRATION BIRDING!



The Sky Islands field trip team below
the looming Chiricahua Mountains
Linda Cunico



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

IN MEMORIAM

John Breitsch: quiet,
generous, stalwart

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of birding on Sept. 23

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you like our direction

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LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Birds + crawlies on an
overnight in SE Colo

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Red-tailed Hawk
Prospect Park
Wheat Ridge, CO
John Breitsch



ON THE COVER

Red-tailed Hawk: Everywhere, ordinarily — and every one, extraordinary



Birder, photographer and field trip leader **John Breitsch**, 60, succumbed to abdominal cancer in August. Born in New York state, he moved to Colorado

in his 30s, began birding at 40 and led his first DFO field trip after turning 50. He left his bird photos to DFO in a Flickr gallery at: www.flickr.com/photos/breitschbirding

Patrick O'Driscoll

This month's cover bird makes a good trivia quiz answer, if the question is: *What native raptor is more widespread across North America than our three most common non-native bird species — Rock Pigeon, House Sparrow and European Starling?* I haven't double-checked with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, but the answer to a follow-up question may be the same: *What bird has more photo images on its [Birds of the World](#) home page than any other?*

For the record, there are 25 different images of Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) on the species' BOW front page. But when you're a bird with 12-16 subspecies, light, intermediate and dark morphs, an array of primary plumages (black, chocolate brown, rufous, pale white), and still more intergrades and regional variations, it takes a photo album to express the range. The species' wardrobe is endless.

Here in the West, Red-tails are polymorphic, varying widely and wildly in color and shade. We are also the home of the species' Krider's variant, a rare, pale, Plains ghost of a Red-tail whose tail is actually white. (A fine example of the subspecies has hung out through much of summer in and around Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR outside Denver.) Unlike most species, the Red-tail rates two full pages in *Sibley Birds* to cover just the basic array.

Every birder seems to have a story or two of memorable encounters with Red-tails in the field. For two decades, birders in Westminster and beyond enjoyed a virtually all-white, leucistic one that hung out near Legacy Ridge Golf Course until its death in August 2020. Myself, I'll always remember the Red-tail that **Chuck Hundertmark** and I happened upon in Denver City Park, early on a Saturday in February 2017. Hunched on the lawn barely 5 feet off the sidewalk, it ignored us, unruffled, as it finished its breakfast of an American Coot.

Common? Yes, certainly the most common hawk on the continent. I consider an eBird checklist anywhere beyond my backyard incomplete if there's not one on it. The species' most recent population estimate is a safe 3.1 million birds.

Uncommon? Yes, uncommonly *glorious*. Belly band or not (some don't have one), russet-tailed or not (juveniles' tails are brown and barred until year 2), Red-tailed Hawks *look* like hawks should look — fierce of eye, acutely alert, aggressively perched, ready for action. And their sky-dancing courtship aerobatics are just jaw-drop amazing.

To say nothing of its iconic, shrill scream — except I will. It's a goose-bumps call so primeval that Hollywood long ago co-opted it as the audio embodiment of "wilderness" or "outdoors" in hundreds of movies and TV episodes — even though directors regularly miscast it as the cry an eagle or other non-Red-tail. Nobody's perfect — but the Red-tailed Hawk seems about as perfect as a hawk can be.

A note: This month's cover bird was photographed in Wheat Ridge's Prospect Park in 2012 by John Breitsch, a gifted photographer and DFO field trip leader who died this summer. The image is among more than 10,000 that John bequeathed to Denver Field Ornithologists. Read our memorial to John beginning on [page 12](#) of in this issue.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park.



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and every one, extraordinary

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leader, compassionate to all

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"birping" quest in SE Colorado
for fliers and . . . creepers!

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Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Monday, Sept. 30, 2024



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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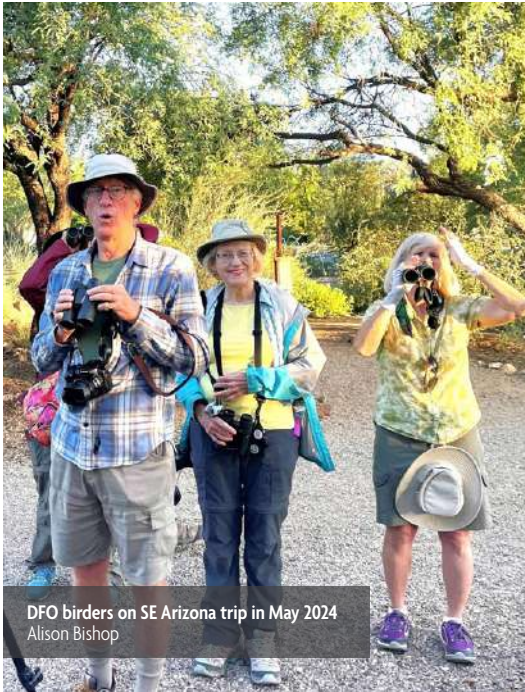
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directly, please contact them
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[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Member survey: Nobody's perfect, but you enjoy DFO a whole bunch



DFO birders on SE Arizona trip in May 2024
Alison Bishop

Sharon Tinianow

Back in July, members of Denver Field Ornithologists were invited to participate in a survey about important matters in our organization. Your responses gave the club's board of directors and committee chairs fresh insight into what you feel is important. This month, I want to share some of those insights and survey results with you.

At the outset, thank you for your great response. Typically, when organizations like ours survey their members, they hope to hear back from 5-10% of their membership. Your response rate to this survey was just above TWENTY-FIVE percent. Wow, such great news! It means that the trends we see in the data would likely hold up even if 100% of members answered the survey.

The questionnaire asked you about this newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, and about DFO club communications in general. It also sought your opinions about the various activities DFO offers members. The survey concluded with an open-ended question asking if you had anything else you wanted to discuss.

From your responses, we can tell that a substantial portion of our membership enjoys *The Lark Bunting* in its current magazine-style form. Just over half of those who responded said they read every issue and another 24% read more than half of the 10 issues we publish each year. Asked to rate the various regular features of our newsletter, no more than 14% of respondents considered any of them "not great." That suggests wide enough appreciation for what we include in *The Lark Bunting* each month to continue delivering you previews of upcoming programs and events, birding essays, reports on major field trips, people profiles, and photo galleries of birds and birders.

In optional comments, members shared what they enjoy in more detail and suggested some new ideas for the newsletter. Some also suggested *The Lark Bunting* is too long to read each month. Our newsletter editor, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, will take all of your comments into consideration for future issues.

Your survey feedback also helped the DFO Communications & Outreach Committee decide to move to a new two-pronged format for future news communications.

Beginning in 2025, *The Lark Bunting* as you know it — a digital magazine published on the DFO website — will be issued as a quarterly journal instead of 10 times a year. It will focus on themes and topics tied less to upcoming deadlines and milestones and more to feature looks at birding issues, people, places and species that DFO and Colorado are about.

At the same time, we will begin a digital newsletter, delivered monthly via email like the current *DFO Digest*, that focuses on immediate, time-sensitive and forward-looking matters. This more easily accessed e-newsletter will contain program previews, calendar reminders of DFO events, need-to-know news updates on key topics, local birding news and other timely information.

Continued on page 6



The survey also found that overall, DFO members are satisfied with the multiple ways they receive information about our club. That said, far more of you rated the newsletter, email digest, and DFO website as “valuable” than social media, DFO items on the COBirds list-serv, and monthly meeting announcements. This suggests that members think the primary focus should remain with the newsletter, digest and website.

To no one’s surprise, survey respondents ranked field trips No. 1 in importance to them, followed by the DFO website, *Lark Bunting* newsletter, “BIRD BOMBS” monthly bird ID webinars, monthly evening programs on Zoom, the Hawk Watch project, and DFO’s grants fund. The way they ranked these features and activities reflects how members feel about the club’s mission. One comment summed it up succinctly: “I think that anything that gets people out in the field or learning about birds aligns with our mission.”

We also learned there are many ways people engage with DFO. But regardless of personal preferences, members see value in variety. “DFO is a big community with a wide range of interests, capabilities, knowledge, available time, etc. . . . So all those activities are important,” one respondent wrote.

The last, open-ended question drew a variety of answers, too. Ideas for field trips and appreciation for everything DFO does were the most frequent replies. A few expressed the wish that DFO have more in-person meetings again. The most frequent complaints? Field trips filling up too quickly, and — frustration with the software program we used to conduct this survey. (We hear you, and we’re working to make it better and easier next time.)

The C&O Committee shared survey responses with the DFO Board and all the club’s committee chairs. They will keep your opinions, ideas and priorities in mind as they make decisions for our club in how we handle field trips, club finances, volunteer recruitment, the Hawk Watch project, and yes, communications.

Thanks to all of you who participated. Your willingness to tell us what’s on your mind is just another way that DFO is a special organization. You show that we all care about how our club works and succeeds, because DFO’s success enhances our enjoyment of the birds that have brought us all together.

Good birding!

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder’s Museum of Natural History.*

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS SEPT. 12: "ASS" WHAT?

You're reading this right: ASSFEET! The grebe family's scientific name *Podicipedidae* combines the Latin words *podicis* ("rear end" or "anus") and *pes* ("foot") to describe the physical placement of grebes' legs toward the rear of their bodies. Learn more about this and other Colorado grebe identification tips in BIRD BOMBS: Assfeet, DFO's next bird ID mini-webinar on **Sept. 12, 7 p.m. MDT**. If you missed the last one, Colorado Bird Taxonomy Made Simple, the video is now available with 28 other episodes in Denver Field Ornithologists' online BIRD BOMBS video library.

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS



DFO VOLUNTEER TRIBUTE IS OCT. 19 AT ARSENAL

This year's Denver Field Ornithologists' Volunteer Appreciation Day celebration is set again for the visitor center at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. This gathering on **Saturday, Oct. 19 from 10 a.m. to noon MDT** will feature coffee-break snacks and beverages, presentation of the club's highest awards for volunteerism, and a live-animal program with "Colorado Native" species by Nature's Educators, Colorado's own wildlife education outreach organization.

In the 89 years since our organization was founded in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club, DFO has functioned solely because of the contributions of time and energy from dedicated volunteers. This second annual event is in tribute to DFO field trip leaders, Hawk Watch volunteers, behind-the-scenes tech helpers, program managers, board and committee members and the club's officers. To attend, volunteers must register themselves and up to one guest.

REGISTER FOR VOLUNTEER TRIBUTE

FALL BIRDING FEST AT BARR LAKE SP SEPT. 14

With autumn migration underway, it's time again for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' annual Fall Birding Festival at Barr Lake SP. This year's event is **Saturday, Sept. 14, 7 a.m. – 1 p.m. MDT**. The morning begins with guided bird tours and a visit to the Conservancy's bird banding station. There will be kid-friendly crafts and activities for youngsters, and educational booths on an array of themes — live birds on the glove, bird dress-up, bird-friendly actions humans can take, and more, including DFO's own information table (and free book giveaway).

BIRDING FEST SCHEDULE AND INFORMATION



CHICO BASIN RANCH NOW OPEN FOR FALL MIGRATION

The first season of fall migration access under Chico Basin Ranch's shortened birding schedule began on **Monday, Sept. 2** and will continue through **Sunday, Oct. 6**. Except for a similar 6-week period in spring, the bird-rich prairie location

Continued on page 8

in El Paso and Pueblo counties is closed to birders the rest of the year. Birding each day is mornings only (7 a.m.-1 p.m.), and access is limited to three eBird hotspot locations on the ranch. Birders must register and pay the \$15 fee in advance online at the website of [Aiken Audubon](https://aikenaudubon.com), the Pike's Peak regional chapter of National Audubon. Aiken now oversees and manages the birding program, and proceeds go to maintain birding access to the ranch. Visitation is limited to just 20 birders a day, and birders can register up to 7 days in advance of their requested date. Those seeking group reservations should first email chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com.

Besides individual birding visits, DFO has scheduled two group field trips to Chico Basin this season: **Monday, Sept. 16** and **Monday, Sept. 23**. Registration for both trips on the [DFO field trips page](#) is filled with long waiting lists, a testament to Chico Basin's popularity.

CHICO BASIN RULES, REGISTRATION, AND DETAILS

NATURE PLAY™ ZONE OPENING IN DENVER CITY PARK

After almost two years of fenced-off construction, a new children's "Nature Play" feature in Denver City Park opens **Sept. 10** with a public celebration at the Denver Museum of Nature + Science (3–9 p.m. MDT, free museum admission). The 4-acre zone that extends below the southwest corner of the museum is a combination of nature-themed playground and natural riparian zone, with a regularly flowing stream for the first time in decades. The museum and Denver Parks & Recreation created Nature Play around what's left of the park's 71-year-old DeBoer Box Canyon and stream corridor, originally a feature of Denver's first botanic garden.

Over the years, the strip also became a patch of unexpectedly attractive habitat for birds — especially during spring and fall migration — even though water rarely flowed except after storms. The restored riparian area, which will recirculate stormwater in a cycling loop, has been replanted with native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees and is crisscrossed with footbridges. The area also has playground features from swings, slides, and carved benches and sculptures of birds and wildlife to rock formations, a climbable log "beaver dam" and a 20-foot-tall Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep play structure.

As heaviest construction activity subsided this summer, more birds have been using the habitat within the still-fenced area. Once the fences come down, the zone's attractiveness to kids may be a test of whether park birdlife (more than 200 species recorded) can coexist with the highest volume of human use in the DeBoer corridor's history.



REFUGE DAY @ ROCKY MTN ARSENAL IS SEPT. 28

The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, one of metro Denver's most popular birding destinations, hosts its annual [Refuge Day](#) open house on **Saturday, Sept. 28**. Activities scheduled between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. MDT include Nature's Educators live animal shows, face painting, arts & crafts, "Try-It Archery" (noon–2 p.m.) at the refuge's archery range, and the opportunity to meet endangered Black-footed Ferrets and urban farm animals. All the activities are free and scheduled at the refuge visitor center (except archery). In addition, various "activity tables" will include a DFO booth staffed by club volunteers who will offer training in optimal use of binoculars. Visitors can bring their own binocs and DFO will provide loaners for the training as well.

Continued on page 9



“FALL INTO BIRDING” FOR BEGINNERS STARTS SEPT. 21

After a successful spring offering, [Front Range Birding Company](#) in Littleton is staging a “Fall into Birding” beginners’ course this autumn, again with DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** as instructor and trip leader. The four-class, five-field-trip course begins **Saturday, Sept. 21** with a “getting-to-know-you” morning field trip. Sessions will then alternate between Wednesday night in-class sessions (6:30–8 p.m.) every other week (Sept. 25, Oct. 9, Oct. 23 and Nov. 6) and four more Saturday morning half-day field outings (Sept. 28, Oct. 19, Oct. 26, Nov. 9). Classes will take place at the Front Range Birding Co. store in Littleton at 10146 W. San Juan Way, #110. Field trip times and locations will be announced.

The course, which costs \$215 per person (payable upon registration), will cover birding basics, how to find and identify local and migratory birds, different bird habitats, best local birding spots, and how to use birding tools including eBird, Merlin ID, and more. Registration is limited to 15 participants. To reserve a spot, call or stop by Front Range Birding Company in Littleton or call 303-979-2473.

CFO’S BIRDING CHALLENGE IS SEPT. 14

Colorado Field Ornithologists’ fourth Colorado Birding Challenge — in which teams and individuals try to find as many bird species as possible in 24 hours in the Colorado county of their choice — is set for **Saturday, Sept. 14**. This year is the first time the challenge will be in autumn. If you’re not already on a team, it’s too late for organizers to place you with one, but you can set one up with as few as two members on CFO’s webpage for the challenge,

As in previous years, funds raised support CFO programs and a noteworthy science or conservation project in the state. This year’s beneficiary is southern Colorado’s Conejos River Restoration Project, which works to restore habitat along the largest tributary to the Rio Grande in the state.

Teams compete in four categories: The Challenge, and The Green Challenge (both have registration fees), and The Under-25 Challenge and Bird Your Own Way categories, which are free. After registration, teams receive a confirmation email with a link to set up their teams’ COBC pages. That’s where teams list name, team members, which county they’ll bird in, and their species goal and fundraising target. Each team page also includes a donation link so supporters can contribute directly to the team’s fundraising goal.

CFO CHALLENGE INFO AND TEAM REGISTRATION





Ted Floyd
© Abby Santurbane Photography

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9

Ted Floyd
Monday, Sept. 23, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

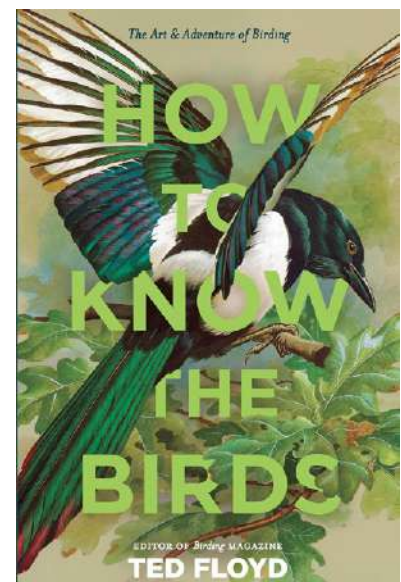
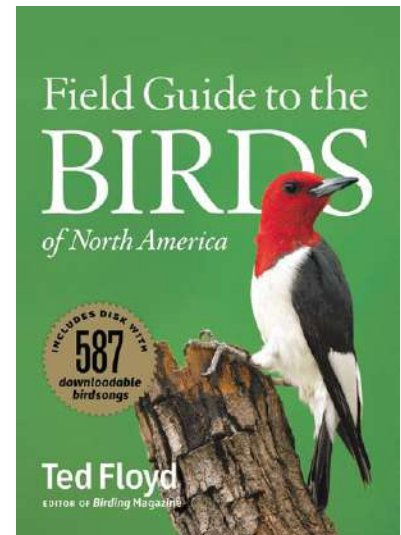
The world of birding is changing fast. eBird and the Merlin Bird ID app continue to alter the way we bird. Cornell Lab's [Macaulay Library](#) delivers terabytes of amazing bird media to the whole world. Top-line optics maker Swarovski has even launched a "smart" binocular that actually works. Meanwhile, the [American Ornithological Society](#) has begun the process of renaming some of the most familiar birds in Colorado and beyond, with plenty of controversy swirling around it. (AOS's "Summit for the Birds" annual meeting this fall, in Estes Park, will feature a public forum on that topic.)

What to make of it all? Our "man on the inside" — distinguished Colorado guidebook author, avian journalist and birding free thinker **Ted Floyd** — will discuss the latest in new knowledge, new tech, new names, and, ultimately, new ways of engaging and appreciating the bird world . . . at least as of September 2024. Hence, the title of his DFO evening program, "*The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9*," on **Monday, Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. And yes: Ted says you can expect it to all change again pretty soon thereafter.

Floyd, who last spoke to DFO almost exactly two years to the day before this presentation, is longtime editor of *Birding* magazine, flagship publication of the [American Birding Association](#). Engaging and energetic, he has written five bird books — including the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (HarperCollins, 2008) and *How to Know the Birds* (National Geographic, 2019) — and he has three more on the way. He has also written more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. He is a frequent speaker at bird festivals, club meetings, and ornithological conferences.

Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, applying new media and emerging technologies toward the appreciation of nature, and interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners. He regularly leads popular field trips in and around Boulder County, where he and his family live in Lafayette.

Ted has served on the boards of Western Field Ornithologists and Colorado Field Ornithologists. He holds a Ph.D. in ecology from Penn State University and has taught biology, math, and statistics to everyone from second graders to advanced graduate students. He is a recent recipient (2022) of the ABA's Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service, and he is a frequent guest on the American Birding podcast. He is a prolific content generator for ABA's online platforms and is especially proud of his involvement in the association's Young Birder programs.





Matthew Young with Redpolls
Melissa Groo

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*

Matthew A. Young
Monday, Oct. 28, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

What makes a finch a finch? A heavy, conical bill meant for cracking open seeds, right? Not so fast, says **Matthew A. Young**, one of the nation's foremost researchers into the finch branches of the avian family tree. It's more complicated than that. Remember Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands? Turns out they're actually tanagers.

Bill size and shape are "no longer the case with taxonomy," says Young, president and founder of the [Finch Research Network](#) and an expert in the many calls of the Red Crossbill, another finch family member. Young will discuss all this and more in DFO's October evening program, "Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*," scheduled for **Oct. 28 at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom** webinar

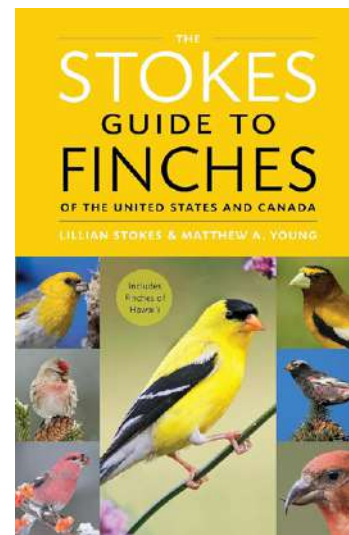
Young is co-author of that new *Stokes* guide, due out in mid-September. "There is no guide to finches for the United States, if you can believe it," he notes. He's also the audio engineer behind much of the bird call and song recordings for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin Bird ID app. He has worked for Cornell on and off for 15 years of an eclectic career that also includes extensive (and current) employment as a social worker with special-needs adolescents and young adults.

He also works with the Rosy Finch Working Group, which he says "is looking into how climate change may play a big role in the future of rosy finches." And he is co-leader of the International Evening Grosbeak Working Group, which is "trying to figure out what led to a 92% decline" in the species in the past 50 years.

Atop all that, Young also studies bogs, fens and orchids. (He founded and is president of the Native Orchid Conservation Network.)

Young has observed and enjoyed nature since early childhood. He first marveled at finches after moving to Yellowstone NP for a summer host job at a park hotel. As he stood at the iconic Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River, "a flock of birds flew in above me and started feeding. It was Red Crossbills. It was the spark — not a spark bird, but a moment in life that shifted my whole being."

He earned his bachelor's degree in water resources and master's in ornithology at two branches of SUNY, the State University of New York. He currently teaches an introductory birding class at Cornell. He was also an adjunct professor in environmental studies at SUNY-Cortland, and he has served as board chair of The Wetland Trust. Young was a regional editor for 10 years with *The Kingbird*, quarterly journal of the New York Ornithological Society.





John Breitsch in the field in 2018



John, rear center, with good DFO friends in 2021 at his First Creek @ GVR patch Patrick O'Driscoll



On his 60th birthday July 10, John with his family, from left, sisters Liz and Barbara, and niece Emma Patrick O'Driscoll

IN MEMORIAM

John Breitsch (1964 – 2024): dedicated birder, inventive trip leader, compassionate to all

Patrick O'Driscoll

Gifted birder and DFO field trip leader **John Breitsch**, a stalwart and gentle-hearted friend to people and birds alike, has left us far too soon. Six months after he was diagnosed with abdominal cancer, John died on Aug. 12, just a month after his 60th birthday. Gaunt and weak but uncomplaining, he spent his final months where the passionate birder in him least wanted to be: in a hospital bed in his northeast Denver living room, under home hospice care.

Still proud, however, that he had survived to his milestone birthday July 10, John chose to celebrate his favorite holiday for the rest of the month. Thanks to his caregiving sister **Barbara Breitsch Moore**, his “Christmas in July” included decorations, a tree, presents, and visits from more family, a best Army buddy and a childhood best friend, all of whom still called him by his boyhood name, “Johnny.”

On July 30, Johnny posted his last Facebook update to friends: *I will make it to August! Yay. September is a bit of a pipe dream. Keep smiling and having fun.*

With his own enigmatic smile and a stoical view of life, John Breitsch called himself “an urban hermit.” For decades from his 20s on, he was comfortable in the solitude of the night shift, working jobs while the rest of us slept. But in his last two decades, he overcame his private and introverted nature to let the caring camaraderie of birding embrace him. He embraced back. As a member and trip leader in Denver Field Ornithologists, John won innumerable friends and admirers with meticulous trip preparation, self-effacing humor, and quiet generosity with his expertise in the field.

“The trip was never about him, it was about helping everybody else,” said **Beth Payne** of Colorado Springs, who became a close friend over the past decade. “New birder or not, if a special or interesting species was spotted, John made sure you got to see the bird.”

His signature move was to arrive at field trip locations an hour or more ahead of everyone else to scout, whether he was leading the trip or not. Because he worked overnights, John’s pre-dawn birding ritual came easily. But he welcomed company, said fellow trip leader and friend

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Anne Craig of Lakewood: “Twice I had the pleasure of walking beside John before dawn. He was at ease in the cool darkness, senses keen and a smile at the ready as he discerned each new bird of the day.”

John’s passing leaves holes in DFO hearts and indelible marks in the Colorado birding community. Five years ago, He revived our club’s bygone practice of multiday, out-of-state birding trips, leading a celebrated six-day ramble through southwestern New Mexico. The spirit of that August 2019 trip burns brightly today in ambitious group excursions by other DFO leaders, from **Joey Kellner**’s two recent expeditions to Arizona’s “Sky Islands” to **David Suddjian**’s 1,300-mile journey last spring to the last four Colorado counties unvisited by Denver Field Ornithologists trips.

John created that New Mexico trip as an alternative to the kind he could never afford: exotic tours for deep-pocketed birders with top guides and luxe amenities. “When I was a new birder, I would have killed to have experienced birders take me down there like this and only have to pay for car, room and board,” he explained. Many on the trip still say it was their best DFO outing ever. (“An absolutely amazing trip, and John Breitsch did such an amazing job!” wrote **John Malenich** of Boulder.) His after-trip report was amazing, too. You can read it at dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/TripReports/9664.pdf.

Another Breitsch innovation was pre-trip information sheets for participants. These PDF guides noted likely species and included maps, trip details, historical notes and fun facts. His printed guide for the epic New Mexico trip was TWENTY-EIGHT pages — with about 28 times the information. No detail was too small, from sunrise/sunset charts to recipes for cooking souvenir New Mexico chilies when they got home. He even packed Windex and paper towels to keep everyone’s windows clear on long dirt-road drives.

Closer to home, John deliberately chose lesser-known destinations for his trips. He liked to promote overlooked birding gems like Star K Ranch, Idalia Park (aka Parkfield Lake Park at the Montbello Rec Center), Pine Valley Ranch Park, Heron Pond Natural Area, White Ranch Park and Parker Regional Park, to name just a few.



That enigmatic smile of John Breitsch, 2017

Continued on page 14

Most of all, John popularized bird-rich First Creek, until recent years a rarely visited riparian corridor through his Green Valley Ranch neighborhood. It would blossom into three fruitful eBird hotspots: the tiny but mighty Green Valley Ranch migrant trap he discovered a mile from his house; the reliable-year-round First Creek @ DEN Open Space off Peña Boulevard at 56th Avenue, and the First Creek Trail west of there into a previously closed part of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

John birded along parts of First Creek more than a decade before the first eBird hotspot pinned it to the map. “That was where my passion for finding birds in little nowhere places started — a place to look and grow,” he explained weeks before his death. “Such under-birded spots became part of my birding philosophy.” His aim was to record quickly at least 100 species at each place to attract more birders. At the three First Creek locations, he saw far more species than any other birder, and he visited each hundreds of times more than the next closest birder.

Born and raised in Chappaqua, NY, John Carl Breitsch was the youngest of the three children of accountant **John W. Breitsch** and homemaker **Eleanor Breitsch**. Growing up introverted and afraid of heights, young John faced his fears head-on. In high school, he threw himself into rock climbing in southeastern New York’s Shawangunk Mountains (aka “The Gunks”), a mecca for serious rock-jocks. After graduation, John enlisted in the Army and threw himself out of airplanes as a paratrooper in the elite 82nd Airborne Division.

“I had never been on a plane in my life,” he recalled last spring, “and now I want to *jump out of planes*? I thought, ‘Conquer your fears,’ because I’m afraid of heights, dude! I’m so freakin’ introverted that I’ll just do what scares the s--- out of me. That was my philosophy at 18.” After the Army, he attended State University of New York-Binghamton for two years before working a decade in historic resort hotels in Pennsylvania’s scenic Pocono Mountains (night auditor was his first after-hours gig). From there John came to Colorado.

After climbing rocks and bailing out of planes, taking up birding would seem the opposite of frightening. But practicing and mastering birding skills among total strangers were challenges. John met them with the same care and precision that his risky earlier pursuits demanded. “The thing about being introverted and going on or leading a field trip is, you

have the birds to fall back on,” John said. “It’s all about the birds.”

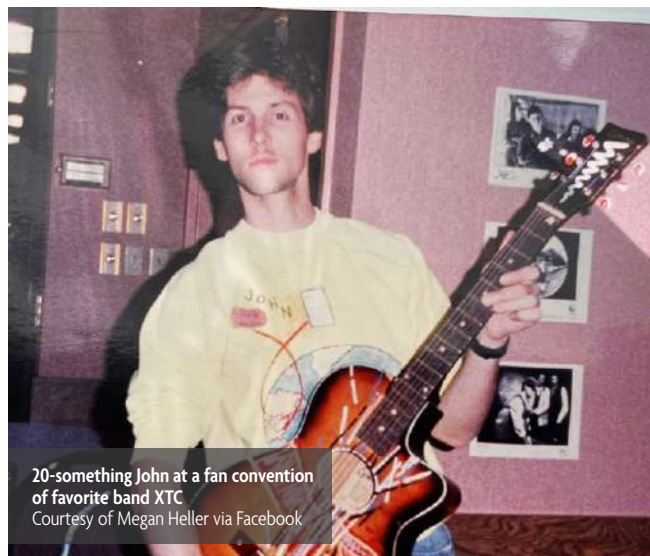
Though he grew up in the scenic Hudson River Valley, John didn’t start birding until after arriving in Colorado in the late 1990s. First to catch his eye were American White Pelicans, cruising in an Arvada golf course pond. “My first thought was, ‘What the hell is a pelican, and what’s it doing here?’ ” he recalled. More “spark” birds at nearby Standley Lake included coots, cormorants and one jaw-dropping-beautiful Blue Grosbeak. “Oh my God,” he remembered thinking, “*this bird exists in nature?*”



Paratrooper John, age 18, in training for Army's 82nd Airborne Division

After outings with the Boulder Bird Club and exploring on his own, John joined DFO more than a decade ago. He became a field trip leader in 2017, leading 44 outings in seven years, the last on Sept. 10, 2023 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Working the night shift was an occupational hazard for a trip leader (his last job was as a certified nuclear pharmaceuticals tech for Cardinal Health). Daytime birding opportunities came in odd and unpredictable spurts.

Continued on page 15



Life wasn't entirely birds. John loved rock music on the edges, especially XTC, Shriekback, The The, Queen and other post-punk, alt-pop bands of the '70s and '80s. He even mixed birds and music in one-of-a-kind hats and tees, one of which read, "The best Bohemians are Waxwings and Rhapsody." He was a fan of **Agatha Christie** mysteries, with an entire bookcase filled with her complete works. Some years ago, John also pursued "a craft session of my life" — plastic-canvas needlepoint, a yarn embroidery method for making two- and three-dimensional art, rugs, vases, figures, dioramas and other works.

Sometime after that last DFO field trip in September 2023, stomach and back pain began to nag. It was not until a doctor's diagnosis early last February that John learned of the cause: an inoperable gastrointestinal stromal tumor the size of a football. It had already invaded his liver and spine, and its pressure against his stomach left him unable to eat. By late spring, John had lost 50 pounds and was too weak to walk more than a few steps at a time.

Never one to complain, he had only told or hinted to a handful of friends. But after an ER visit in May that led to several days in the hospital, John shared details with a wider circle. "Hi folks," he wrote to friends May 26 on Facebook. "I've had some people wondering about my situation." He explained it in frank terms, with typically dry humor and zero self-pity. He now had IV fluids, blood transfusions, an intestinal feeding tube and "other odds and ends to get me jump started. Hopefully I will get nutrients this way much easier."

"In the meantime," he added, "you won't see me leading any birding trips. Be well out there and have some fun. I'm doing great other than the health, so no worrying necessary. Love to all, John."

A month later, after several falls one night, John returned to the ER, and then the ICU. The feeding tube and oral chemo hadn't worked, and he'd now lost 60 pounds. A week later, he went home to hospice care. His sister Barbara arrived from Connecticut to oversee his needs tirelessly for the final six weeks. The night he died, she posted on John's Facebook page that she envied his "ability to truly exist in each present moment, and he liked himself and his own company. So, while the process was very difficult, as you can imagine, he handled it with acceptance and strength."

In July, John donated birding equipment and several boxes of books on birds and birding to DFO, along with open access to his personal Flickr photo gallery online. It contains more than 10,000 images, most of them never seen beyond eBird checklists and some Facebook posts. Ironically, he had deliberately avoided bird photography until about 5 years after he started birding: "I wanted to learn how to really see a bird first. When you look at it through the camera lens, you see a bird differently. My motto is, 'I'm a birder, not a photographer.'" For not-a-photographer, John's bird images are amazing. See for yourself at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/breitschbirding/>.

John also left a collection of more than 25 "DFO Fact Sheets" he wrote and designed to be printed as handout profiles of Colorado bird species. (He left unfinished templates for about 20 more.) He conceived them several years ago with then-DFO President **Chuck Hundertmark** as they talked about how to connect the club with new audiences at festivals, public events and other gatherings.

John is survived by his mother, siblings and a niece, all of Connecticut and New York state: mother **Eleanor Breitsch**; sisters **Elizabeth Breitsch** and **Barbara Breitsch Moore**, and Barbara's daughter, **Emma Gianoplus**. In lieu of flowers, the family asks John's friends to consider memorial donations to Denver Field Ornithologists.

Birding friends in Colorado will scatter John's ashes in the coming weeks and months at some of the birding spots he loved the most.



Birding at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, September 2019
Rosanne Juergens



2018 selfie that John labeled "Human" on Facebook

IN MEMORIAM

Memories of our friend John

*Editor's note: After the untimely death on Aug. 12 of widely admired Colorado birder and DFO member **John Breitsch**, The Lark Bunting gathered comments and memories from friends, acquaintances and others who knew or had birded with him.*

I first birded with John as a DFO leader in August 2021 at White Ranch, where he was subbing for **Chris Gilbert**. John's "preflight" email to the group was typical of his unassuming and gentle nature: *We may not go as fast or as far, but it is a beautiful area and there should still be some young birds around to confuse us.*

— **Anne Craig**, Lakewood

What a great, big-hearted, and patient guy. I would love to see this eBird hotspot [**First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch**] named after him -- he's the one who made it famous. <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5723111>

— **Mark Obmascik**, Denver, via Facebook

I got to know John on the first of my five Christmas Bird Counts at First Creek @ DEN Open Space on New Year's Day 2019. We kept up a good friendship with conversations and other bird outings. In an email exchange in 2020, he wrote kiddingly that he wanted to go to Africa "for the weekend" to see the [Ring of Fire eclipse](#). I replied, "Why is it called that? I want to see that!" Four years later, visiting John in home hospice, I told him I was able to photograph the annular solar eclipse last October. He really perked up at that, still fascinated. Knowing I was also a moon chaser, he pointed to two beautiful, long-exposure landscapes on his living room wall — taken only with the light of a full moon. I told him I will try that sometime, another of the ways I'll remember John.

— **Rosanne Juergens**, Littleton

Continued on page 17

I met John in 2015 on a field trip at Chico Basin Ranch. We became Facebook friends, and after I traveled to Arizona to go birding, I posted about the trip. Right away, John contacted me eagerly: “*You went to Tucson? What did you see? Where did you go?*” On maybe our third time birding together, we went to Barr Lake. Heading for the boardwalk, we passed an American Coot lying dead on the trail. John stopped and stood there a moment. When he looked up, tears were rolling down his face. That told me everything I needed to know — his compassion for nature and everything in it. We became very close friends.

— **Beth Payne**, *Colorado Springs*

What a wonderful friend! John had a child-like sense of awe, love, and enthusiasm for birds, animals, and all of nature. Every field trip was an adventure. Within 30 minutes of meeting him on our first DFO trip together, he felt like my younger brother. John was generous and irrepressible — his comments made everyone laugh. I’ll miss his texts, checking to see what birds I’d seen and asking about my family. I will *really* miss John’s bright, beautiful spirit.

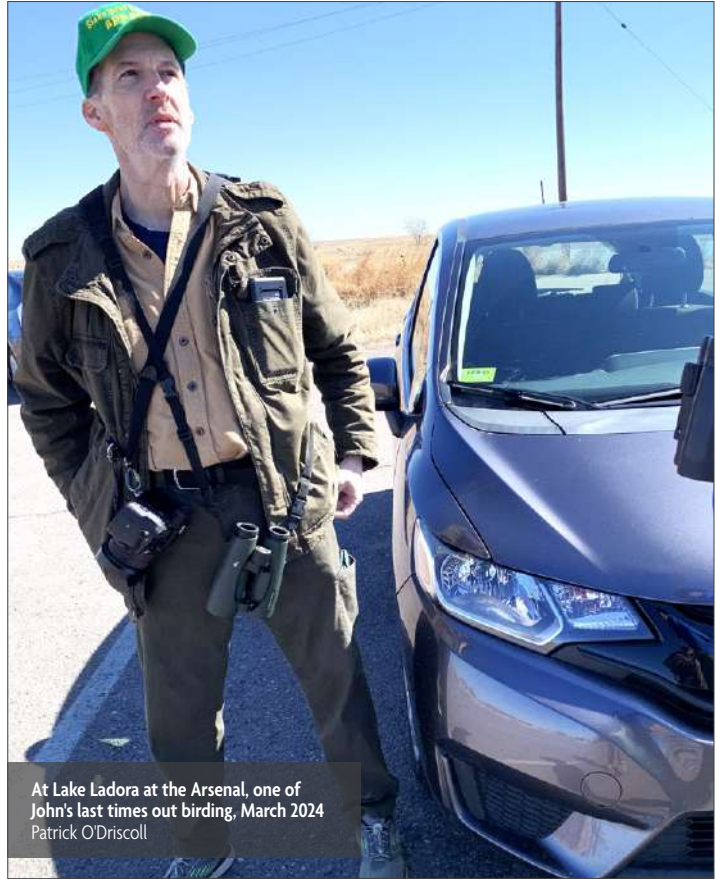
— **Sharon Kermiet**, *Denver*

This warms my heart. I am John’s ex-wife, and we got into birding together about 20 years ago. It happened by chance when I saw several huge white birds in the pond by John’s apartment in Arvada. We didn’t know what they were (American White Pelicans, we later learned), but the birding kind of skyrocketed from there. Despite our divorce, John was still gentle and kind, and truly a joy. I’m so happy he had so many friends in his birding community and that he was loved by so many people.

— **Pamela Crystal**, *Aurora*

So sad. I only met him once, when I rode my bike all the way over there from Littleton to meet John [*at First Creek @ GVR*] to get the Yellow-crowned Night Heron in 2021 for my **Joe Roller** Memorial Green Big Year. We had an awesome morning birding around there.

— **Scott Somershoe**, *Littleton, via Facebook*



At Lake Ladora at the Arsenal, one of John's last times out birding, March 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll



Birding hats and binoculars at home
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 18

Oh my goodness. This hits hard. I had no idea . . . Not John! He was a kindred spirit, a wingman on every birding trip.

— **Chris Rurik**, Lakebay, WA, via Facebook

Rest in peace, friend and birding buddy. I vividly remember first meeting John in 2012 on the trail along the South Platte River a little north of 88th. We were on the quest to see a rare Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*). We were successful . . . and had a great time getting to know each other . . . When I saw a Little Blue Heron again last January at South Padre Island in Texas, I thought of that time 12 years ago when our friendship was made.

— **Mark Amershek**, Denver, via Facebook

John was very generous. Several times during the annual Christmas Bird Counts in northeast Denver, he invited all the birders to bring their lunch and eat together in his house. John was so well-prepared and diligent for the trips he led. He would come to the birding place early after working all night and check out all the birds before the rest of us arrived. Finally, John was the creator and first leader of the First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch birding hotspot. I follow his checklist there because it helps to find many life birds for me.

— **Joe Chen**, Denver

I would be at First Creek at what I thought was early, 6 a.m., and John would already be coming around the corner, camera in hand: “Oh, Karen, you just missed a Nashville Warbler, a Hermit Thrush,” et cetera. Damn, it’s just not right that the best die young. The week John passed, I went back on my birthday to walk First Creek. I almost expected to see him coming down the path with his big camera, just off the night shift. First Creek was dull that day — just Common Grackles, Eurasian Collared Doves, Rock Pigeons — as if the beauty, bird sounds and life had left with John.

— **Karen Drozda**, Denver

John was an integral part of my life for the last several years and I consider myself blessed to have been his friend. He was loved unconditionally and will be missed more than mere words can express.

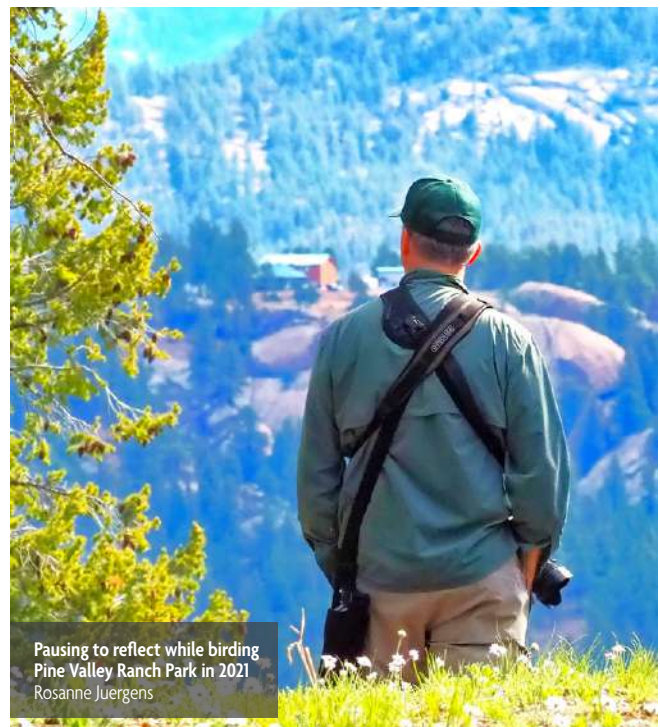
— **Felice Lyons**, Denver

John’s enthusiasm, birding skills, and friendliness will be greatly missed.

— **Chuck Hundertmark**, Lafayette, via Facebook

In the field, John had an unusually sharp ear and eye, often the fastest to ID a distant bird. He downplayed his gift, crediting instead the extra distance and magnification of his bulky, 12x50-power Swarovski binoculars. “They are scope-esque,” he said dryly. But John never mentioned what strength, practice and skill it took to swing those heavy binocs up in a flash, then quickly relocate a target bird within a field of vision far narrower than ours. That was just superhuman.

— **Patrick O’Driscoll**, Denver





Nature's Educators showing Golden Eagle at Swanson Elementary in Arvada
Mike Fernandez

DFO GRANTS

DFO grantee report: Nature's Educators raptor road show in JeffCo schools

EDITOR'S NOTE: Recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund are asked to report to club members on their work with a program talk, a field trip, or an article in The Lark Bunting. Devin Jaffe, founder and executive director of Florence, CO-based [Nature's Educators](#), chose the third option. This article is about the group's 2024-funded grant project, "Presentations in Jefferson County Schools."

Devin Jaffe

Thanks to an incredibly helpful \$986 grant from Denver Field Ornithologists, Nature's Educators presented three 1-hour raptor programs at schools in Jefferson County this past spring. The highlight of these programs, as always, was the displaying of live hawks, eagles and other birds of prey up close for rooms full of elementary school children.

One thousand students and teacher attendees at three JeffCo schools — Webb Elementary in Arvada on March 29, Mount Carbon Elementary in Littleton on April 8 and Swanson Elementary in Arvada on May 15 — also learned about raptor identification, the birds' diets and habitats, conservation efforts, personal histories and more.

We hope that after participating in these interactive programs, students will want to help observe raptors in their areas and take an active role in conservation. Our presenters teach "easy" conservation efforts for students to take. They include keeping household cats indoors and never throwing unfinished food out car windows, as discarded items can attract wild birds and other animals into road traffic, a too-common danger to wildlife.

Our conservation messages make a greater impression when audiences get to meet wild species live, not just via photos or video. Our "ambassador" birds come from among more than 40 hawks, eagles, falcons, owls and other species that Nature's Educators and our partners shelter. Webb Elementary's 350 students got to meet our Harris's Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Barn Owl, and Peregrine Falcon. Mount Carbon Elementary's 150 students were introduced to our Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Ferruginous Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon. At Swanson Elementary, 650 students met our Golden Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel.

Nature's Educators' hard-working ambassadors (human and avian) have touched many lives thanks to this DFO grant, along with the excellent information cards from DFO's Hawk Watch program (based atop Jefferson County's Dinosaur Ridge) that we handed out to the students.

Founded in 2008 in Cañon City, CO, Nature's Educators is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit wildlife program that travels Colorado and surrounding states giving informational presentations on wildlife and wild places. It also offers virtual programming, bird "flight shows," and continuing education. It can be reached at info@natureseducators.org and 719-455-HAWK (4295).



**NATURE'S
EDUCATORS**



BIRDING

45th Denver Fall Bird Count set for Sept 13-16

The Denver Fall Bird Count, a seasonal tradition begun and kept alive for 45 years by prominent and longtime Colorado birder **Hugh Kingery**, is set for a four-day weekend in September.

The count has returned each spring and fall to eight prominent birding locations across metro Denver, including four local state parks (Barr Lake, Castlewood Canyon, Cherry Creek and Chatfield), Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, the Audubon Nature Center near Chatfield, the lower Bear Creek area. This year, Bear Creek Lake Park in Lakewood also is included.

Kingery “is taking a well-deserved break from coordinating these counts,” said **Charlie Chase**, the new coordinator beginning this fall. Coincidentally, Chase also was recently named interim vice president for DFO.

Birders interested in participating can contact Chase with any questions at charlesachase3@gmail.com. To sign up for the counts, contact the leader for each outing. Here are the dates, locations, count leaders and contact information for each:

FRIDAY, SEPT. 13

- Cherry Creek SP, **Cynthia Madsen**, cmadsen08@gmail.com
- Audubon Nature Center / Roxborough Road, **Bill Schreitz**, flannelmouth@gmail.com
- Barr Lake periphery (outside park), **Gregg Goodrich**, gregggododrich@gmail.com

SATURDAY, SEPT. 14

- Chatfield SP, **Joey Kellner**, vireol@comcast.net
- Lower Bear Creek area, **Rick Cresswell**, rickcresswell@yahoo.com

SUNDAY, SEPT. 15

- Castlewood Canyon SP, **Dave Hill**, davidhill2357@gmail.com
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, **Charlie Chase**, charlesachase3@gmail.com

MONDAY, SEPT. 16

- Barr Lake SP, **Chris Gilbert** and **Charlie Chase**, charlesachase3@gmail.com
- Bear Creek Lake Park, **Mary Geder**, mfg5000@live.com

The fall count and its spring counterpart were begun in 1979 through DFO by a group of birders including Kingery. “Various people coordinated it early on and after a while Hugh became the coordinator,” Chase said. After dwindling participation and difficulties setting up registration on the DFO website, the club decided to suspend coordinating the count after 2022. Stats for the first 42 counts through 2021 (COVID-19 forced cancellation of the 2020 count) are still accessible on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/Birds/SpringFall/SpringFallSpecies.aspx>. Click “Spring/Fall Count Summary” and then either the “spring” or “fall” button to view count statistics back to 1979.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

August DFO trips *In Focus*

Late summer DFO field trips in August 2024 included 15 outings where participants took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 89-year-old club. (This month we’re also including a 16th photo, from a late July trip.)

If you’re on DFO trips in September, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the issue of *The Lark Bunting* due out in October. Action shots of birders are preferred, but posed group pictures are acceptable, too. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is last day of the month — **Monday, Sept. 30** for the next issue. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people* for this feature, please. Thanks!

JULY 25-26

Birds Plus + Herps, SE Colorado

(Cheyenne, Lincoln, Otero, Kiowa, Bent,
Las Animas, Crowley counties)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Christopher Curwen, Jenyva Fox, Steve Herbert,
Christie Owens, Courtney Rella, and
Jennifer and Robert Tonge

Trip leader Joey Kellner leads stargazing session with laser pointer
during Birds Plus + Herps field trip July 25-26 to SE Colorado
(Steve Herbert)



AUGUST 6

Beaver Ranch Park

(Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Coreen Spellman, Phil Lyon, Joey Caskey,
Oliver Urdiales, Phil Waltz, Kathy Kuncie

Photographers focus on Red-naped Sapsucker
(2nd tree back) during Aug. 6 trip to Beaver Ranch Park
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 22

AUGUST 10

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

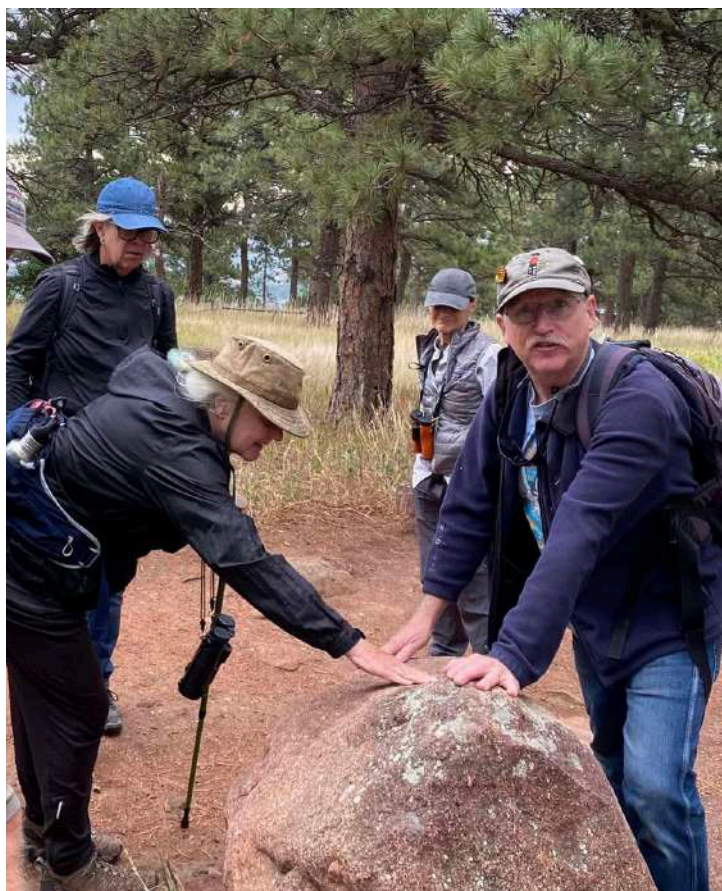
Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Lynn Slaga, Brady Anderson, Mary Ramsey,
Linda Purcell, Gigi Zarzuela, Bonnie Prado, Matthew
Fast, Eileen Warner, Cindi Inklebarger

Birders examining a beetle on the ground
during Rocky Mountain Arsenal field trip Aug. 10
(Cindi Inklebarger)



AUGUST 11

Birds Plus + Geology, National Center for Atmospheric Research Trail (Boulder)

Leaders

Jason Bidgood and Dave Sutherland

Participants

Courtney Rella, Christie Owens, Shay Lyons,
Christopher Curwen, Lori Potter, Mark Bennett,
Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Jim Petri, Jeanne Dillon,
Becky Russell, Nicole Callaway, Kris Tita

Field naturalist Dave Sutherland explains sandstone makeup
of Boulder's Flatirons during Birds Plus + Geology field trip
Aug. 11 at NCAR in Boulder
(Courtney Rella)

Continued on page 23

AUGUST 13
East Boulder Trail
(Boulder)

Leader
Chuck Hundertmark

Participants
Christie Owens, Marjorie Middleton,
Sharon Tinianow, Joe Chen, Todd Maston

Birders scope from a viewpoint on Aug. 13
East Boulder Trail field trip led by Chuck Hundertmark
(Joe Chen)



AUGUST 15
Birds Plus + Recycled Art
(Douglas, Teller)

Leader
Diane Roberts

Participants
Debby Miller, Julia Gwinn, Cindi Inklebarger,
Steve Whitman, Laura Hollenbaugh, Joe Chen

TIF_Birders visiting Rita the Rock Planter sculpture on
Birds Plus + Recycled Art field trip Aug. 15 to Teller County
(Joe Chen)

AUGUST 16
Birds Plus + Natural History,
CU Boulder, Boulder Creek
(Boulder)

Leader
David Suddjian and Emily Braker

Participants
Leanne McDorman, Judy McKeon, Debby Miller,
Debbie Fox, Joe Chen, Emily Scheler, Cindi Inklebarger

Emily Braker shows array of specimens at CU Boulder
vertebrate lab, a stop during Birds Plus+ Natural History
field trip Aug. 16 in Boulder
Joe Chen



Continued on page 24



AUGUST 21

Staunton SP (Jefferson)

Leader
Norm Lewis

Participants

Eileen Warner, Lynn Slaga, Andrea Duran,
Sharon Tinianow, Joe Chen, Chip Dawes,
Chris Thompson, Cindi Inklebarger

On the trail during DFO field trip Aug. 21
in Staunton SP, one of the “best bird hikes” in trip
leader Norm Lewis’s book on Front Range birding
(Joe Chen)

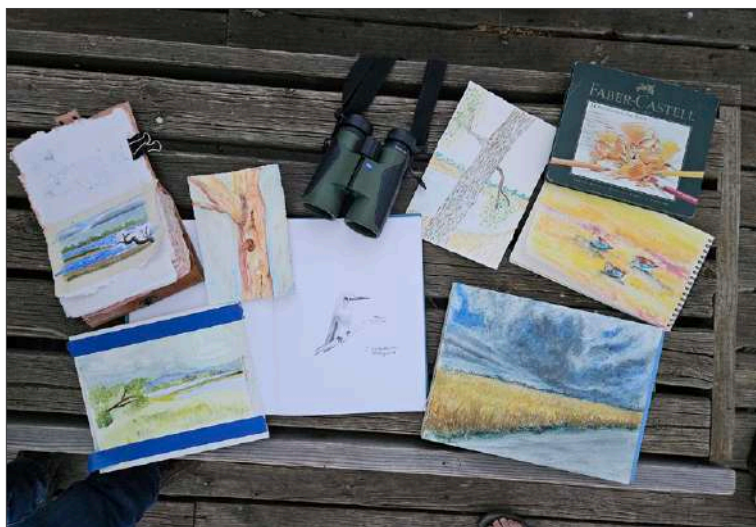
AUGUST 23

Birds Plus + Birdscaping, Littleton (Jefferson)

Leaders
Courtney Rella and Tina Jones

Participants
Kris Saucke, Stephen Smith, Kathryn Smith, Debby
Miller, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Jana Everett, Virginia
Gulakowski, Susan Ringoen

DFO birder-gardener Tina Jones discussing
native plants in her bird-friendly Littleton garden
during Birds Plus+ field trip Aug. 23
(Courtney Rella)



AUGUST 25

Birds Plus + Nature Journaling, Barr Lake SP (Jefferson)

Leader
Carly Crow

Participants

Dee Patterson, Susan Shetterly,
Cindi Inklebarger, Catherine Millard

Field trippers' creations from a Birds Plus + Nature
Journaling trip Aug. 25 at Barr Lake SP
(Carly Crow)

Continued on page 25

AUGUST 25
Ken Caryl Valley
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Robin Trevillian, Ryan Corda, Kevin and
Catherine Millard, Cassandra Stroud

Golden Eagles above Ken Caryl Valley capture
DFO field trippers' attention on Aug. 25 outing
(David Suddjian)



AUGUST 26
Northeastern Colorado
(Washington, Morgan, Logan)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Diane Roberts, Ryan Corda, Joey Caskey,
Oliver Urdiales, Kenneth Stuckey

Scanning for birds from the sandy shore of
Prewitt Reservoir SWA on Aug. 26 field trip
(David Suddjian)

AUGUST 29
Birds Plus + Bird Photography,
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Adams)

Leader
David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants
Catherine Millard, Coreen Spellman, Melody Serra,
Cindi Inklebarger, Martha Strickland, Bonnie Prado,
Nadiyah Watts, Virginia Gulakowski, Kathy Johnson

Bird photographer Dave Prentice, center, co-leading Birds Plus +
Bird Photography field trip Aug. 29 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(David Suddjian)



Continued on page 26

AUGUST 30

Birds Plus + Beavers, Coal Creek (Jefferson)

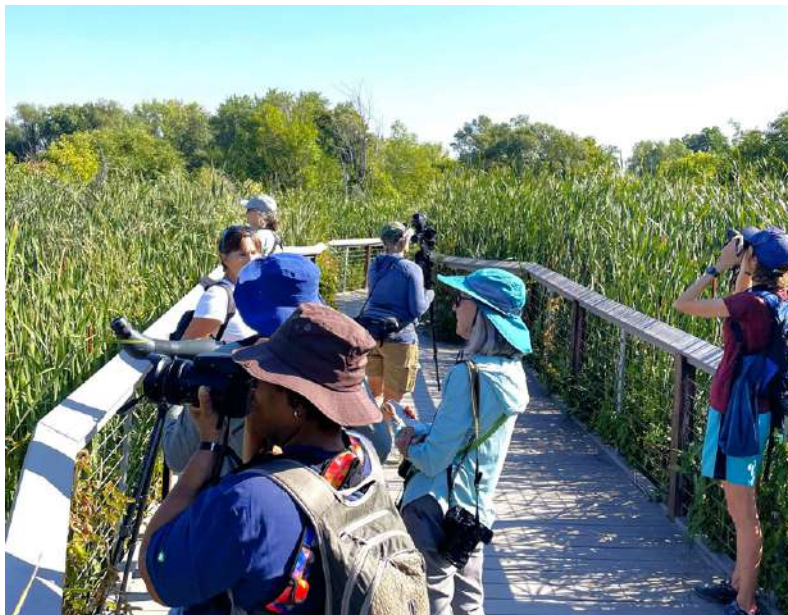
Leader

Courtney Rella and Sheridan Samano

Participants

Sharon Tinianow, Marjorie Middleton, Shai Ronen,
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Joe Chen,
John Williams, Janet Johnston, Melody Serra, Yvonne Parrott,
Anne Craig, Steve Hebert, Hanna Supanich-Winte

Eco-tour guide Sheridan Samano describes beaver activity along
Coal Creek during Birds Plus + Beavers field trip on Aug. 30
(Courtney Rella)



AUGUST 31

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leader

Gigi Zarzuela

Participants

Patricia Kuzma Sell, Henrika McCoy,
Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Ellen Bracchi Arvada,
Eileen Warner, Cat Phanthamany, Marie Mager,
Joe Chen, Lynn Slaga

Field trippers crowd Bass Lake boardwalk Aug. 31 on
DFO's monthly outing in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Nadiyah Watts)

AUGUST 31

Common Poorwill Evening, Ken Caryl Valley (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cassandra Stroud, Tim Redmond, Diane Sanelli,
Marjorie Middleton, Sheila Liley, Tolline Gallagher,
Susan Blansett

Quiet sunset in Ken Caryl Valley on Aug. 31 evening
field trip to see and hear Common Poorwills
(Susan Blansett)



Tech comms? Social media? Newsletter aide? Trip leader? Come help DFO

Volunteers make DFO run. And who are they? People like YOU.

Denver Field Ornithologists functions thanks to people who have stepped forward to ask: How can I help? We've got a few answers below, but DFO is open to volunteer service in whatever way you think you can help.

As an all-volunteer organization, DFO exists only because people like you offer your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. Whether it's a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless assets.

Here are some priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com for more details. And if you're got a talent or skill that you think DFO can use, let Phil know that, too, won't you?

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISER

DFO needs a member with “techie” background, and knowledge and interest in online streaming and event recording (audio-video), to help present programs and conduct meetings and webinars

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTER (COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEE)

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO's Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms, your role could be intermittent, on an as-needed basis. We also seek expertise in helping DFO develop a strategic plan for our social media communications

ASSISTANT PROGRAMS MANAGER

Working with DFO Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, this volunteer helps develop and arrange DFO's monthly evening programs in spring and fall, and helps write and post notices, articles and links to promote these Zoom-based presentations on our social media and in our newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*

FIELD TRIP LEADER

Field trips are DFO's signature club activity, and the Field Trips Committee is always looking to add more trip leaders to the team. Experienced birders who are familiar with DFO field trips and have experience or ability to lead people in small group activities are a plus, but anyone interested can ask for more details

NEWSLETTER AND MONTHLY DIGEST ASSISTANT

You'll help compile and write short items and “blurbs” about DFO events, programs, club news and people for *The Lark Bunting*, our periodic newsletter and the *DFO Monthly Digest* email update. Basic writing ability is a plus, but your interest and ideas about what to write and show are a double-plus

Bird books on eBay: Your purchase helps DFO

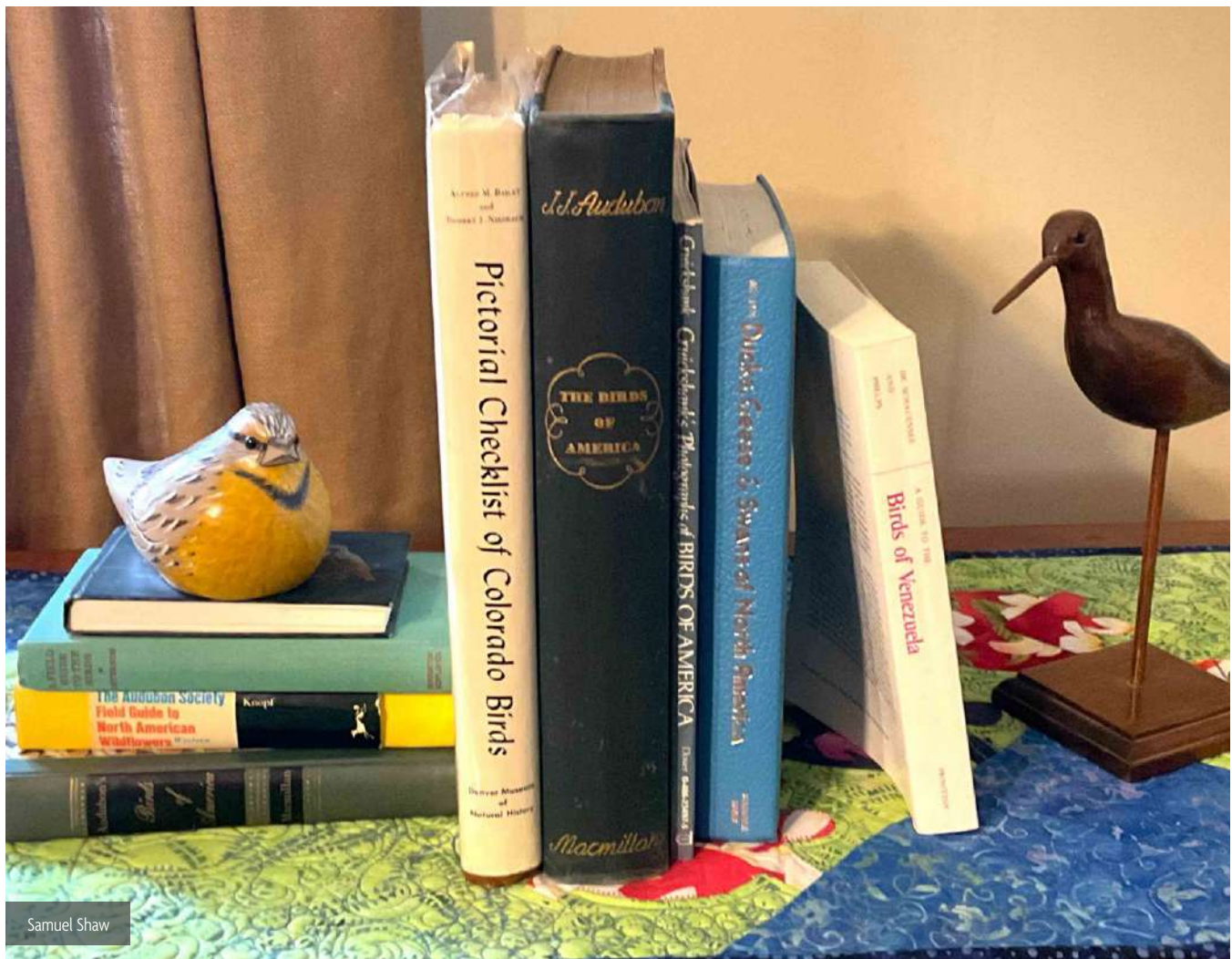
Got books? Birds and birding books? DFO still has some of the volumes that longtime DFO member **Barry Knapp** gave us last spring to sell for the club cause.

Covers, descriptions and prices for the 20 remaining rare and hard-to-find titles are still up on eBay and available to browse and buy at the sales site.

They include beautifully illustrated coffee-table books (*Birds of America*, *Birds of Britain*, *Song and Garden Birds*), books on bird families (seabirds, finches, shorebirds), regional guides (western US, Mexico, Florida, Hawaii, Tikal, Britain and Europe), even field guides to mushrooms and a vintage LIFE Magazine Books title, *The Wonders of Life on Earth*.

With the holidays and gift-giving season coming sooner than you think, perhaps there's something there to add to your gift list. Give it a look, and thanks for shopping. All proceeds go to continuing DFO programs and services for YOU.

BROWSE BIRDING BOOKS ON EBAY



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Field tripping: An overnight “birping” quest in SE Colorado for fliers and . . . creepers!

THE TRIP: Southeastern Colorado Birds Plus + Herptiles (“herps”)

DATES: Sunday–Monday July 25–26, 2024

LEADER: **Joey Kellner** + 7 participants

SPECIES: 83 bird species on [17 eBird checklists](#) + 16 herp species

Continued on page 30



Crowding around to see Tiger Salamanders
at bottom of abandoned homestead well
in Otero County
Steve Herbert



Courtney holding Plains
Black-headed Snake
Joey Kellner

Joey Kellner

On a morning in late July, two carloads of DFO birders headed east of metro Denver for a two-day birding excursion with a twist. Like always, we would scan the skies, fences, trees and brush for our friends with wings. But we also would search the ground and grasses for wingless friends with scales and warts. In the end, we saw plenty of birds (87 species!) — and found (and even handled) more than a dozen kinds of herps, too!

Herps? Yes, HERPS. (*Not* herpes!) From [herpetology](#), the branch of zoology that covers reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders). Related but different, both families consist of cold-blooded, four-legged vertebrates. When commonly studied together, they go by a common name — *herptile*, or *herp* for short.

I went over all of this as we stood together on July 25 on a remote dirt road east of Limon on the Colorado Plains. The seven of us from the northern Front Range had just met up with our eighth member from farther south. (Besides me, the crew included **Christopher Curwen**, **Jenyva Fox**, **Steve Herbert**, **Christie Owens**, **Courtney Rella**, and **Jennifer** and **Robert Tonge**.) With roadside introductions, we talked about the birds in the area and our “road cruising” adventure ahead later, after dark. For two days together, we would be both birders and herpers — BIRPERS!



Uncommon night sighting
of a Texas Horned Lizard
Jenyva Fox

Continued on page 31

Back in our vehicles, we continued south, stopping now and then along the dusty backroads. Soon, Jenyva found our first herp: a female [Ornate Box Turtle](#). A short time later, a [Plains Hognose Snake](#) slithered into view. On our stops, we talked about the environment around us and how these animals eat and live.

After changing a flat tire (my trips always seem to have one unscripted road challenge or another), we pushed down to Long Lake in Kiowa County for waterfowl and shorebirds. While there we also flushed a very nice Peregrine Falcon. High water and no shoreline meant almost no waterbirds at our next stop, Blue Reservoir in Bent and Kiowa counties (also known as Adobe Creek Reservoir SWA). So we headed on to Cheraw Lake in Otero County.

By then the temperature had reached the mid-90s. But plenty of summer resident species were still present at Cheraw, including Black-necked Stilt, Snowy Plover (with young) and Eared Grebe, to name three. Even in midsummer, migrant shorebirds were already starting to move south in good numbers, including sandpipers (Baird's, Western, Least, Stilt), Wilson's Phalaropes and both kinds of Yellowlegs.

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Plains Hognose Snake
Steve Herbert



Ornate Box Turtle found
along SE Colorado road
Jenyva Fox



Ash-throated Flycatcher
along Otero Co Road 804
Robert Tonge



Painted Bunting along
Higbee Valley Road south
of La Junta
Courtney Rella



Clark's Grebe and young at
Lake Henry in Crowley Co
Courtney Rella

LAST WORD *cont from page 31*

By midafternoon, as the thermometer flirted with 100 degrees, we checked in at our motel in La Junta and all retired for cooling *siestas*. Reconvening at 4:30 p.m. for an early dinner at the famous Lucy's Tacos, we compared similarities and differences among birders and herpers, went over herp ID by both sight and sound, and previewed the evening ahead.

With some of us in yellow reflective vests for group visibility and safety, we spent the remaining daylight and then hours of darkness until 1 a.m. on a slow backroads cruise for herps. Whenever we spotted one the road, we pulled over, hazard lights flashing, and got out carefully to examine, photograph and identify each herp. My own Colorado Parks & Wildlife permit allowed me to handle herps briefly in the wild for ID and education purposes.

After each flashlight huddle, we released the herp off the road in the direction it was going when we found it. And what an array we found: eight kinds of snake and four kinds of lizard, plus toads and two Barred Tiger Salamanders. A nocturnal bonus was enjoying all the stars and the Milky Way as we went.

After a 1:15 a.m. nightcap and discussion of Day 2's plans, we managed about 4 hours of sleep before circling up outside the motel at 6:30 a.m. July 26. Back on birding track, we headed south of La Junta along bird-rich [Higbee Valley Road](#) to see Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Canyon Towhee, Rock Wren, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak and — bonus! — a pair of Painted Buntings. Next stop after that was Pickett Wire Canyon. Although we missed a previously reported Gray Vireo there, we did get to see Texas Horned Lizard (“horny toad”) and a pair of Eastern Collared Lizards.

With the morning heat already near 90 degrees, we stopped for a late brunch-to-go, retraced our route north to Lake Cheraw, and from there went to Lake Henry in Crowley County. After great looks at two Clark's Grebes with young riding on their backs, it was time to escape the heat and head homeward.

Our new squad of birpers learned a lot and said they had a good time. I could tell because not one of them fell asleep during our late-night road cruising. Too many cool herps to see, and no one wanted to miss a thing.

Continued on page 33



Cassin's Kingbird
Courtney Rella



Burrowing Owl at Cage Ranch
Robert Tonge



Eastern Collared Lizards
in Picketwire Canyon
Jenyva Fox

P.S.: The things we did *not* miss seeing include:

- **Birds** — All of them (some with photos) are on the eBird trip report at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/262996>
- **Herptiles** — Barred Tiger Salamander (2), Green Toad, Woodhouse's Toad (2), Ornate Box Turtle, Eastern Collared Lizard (2), Texas Horned Lizard (2), Prairie (Six-lined) Racerunner, Prairie Lizard, Kansas Glossy Snake, Plains Hognose Snake, Chihuahuan Night Snake, Great Plains Ratsnake (unfortunately DOR, "dead on road"), Bullsnaek (several), Plains Black-headed Snake, Lined Snake (3, one with eggs/young), and Prairie Rattlesnake (2)
- **Other critters** — A bull elk, a species of shrew, Kangaroo Rats, smaller "mice," American Badger, Coyote, Mule Deer, Swift Fox, dung beetles (rolling a ball of cow dung), Steel-blue Cricket-hunter, Western Spotted Orbweaver (many) and the occasional human

Joey Kellner, a 39-year member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count, a club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor.



Lined Snake underside showing half-moon spots
Joey Kellner



Texas Horned Lizard
Courtney Rella



Birding and herping in SE Colorado
Steve Herbert



Trip leader Joey Kellner with a daylight look at a Texas Horned Lizard
Steve Herbert

*Until the next
Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY FALL
BIRDING!*



Common Nighthawk roosting in
morning on fence post in SE Colorado
Jenyva Fox



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Denver's Bluff Lake @ 30:
city's No. 1 eBird hotspot

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Prewitt *pirouette*:
Peregrine vs. shorebirds

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CLUB NEWS

Help wanted:
DFO treasurer, other
volunteer roles, too

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The magic of seeing
birds you'd only heard

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
John C. Breitsch
Red Rocks Park, Jefferson Co



DFO member, field trip leader and photographer **John C. Breitsch** died in August 2024, one month after his 60th birthday. He

bequeathed to DFO more than 10,000 bird images in his [Flickr photo gallery](#), including the one on this month's cover.

ON THE COVER

Whose scrub-jay? Woodhouse's . . . So: Who is Woodhouse again?

Patrick O'Driscoll

I spent too much time the other day trying to answer a simple question: Why is our shy, dusty scrub-jay of the inland West called Woodhouse's?

As you may recall, the bird got this name only eight years ago. In 2016, The American Ornithological Society (AOS) split the Western Scrub-Jay into two species. The brighter blue, bold and chatty neighborhood birds of the Pacific Coast states became the California Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*). The grayer, inconspicuous outskirts-dwellers of the Great Basin, Rockies and Southwest became Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*).

That's the scrappy bird on this month's cover. Our late DFO friend and field trip leader **John Breitsch** captured this one, bill jammed with nuts, at Denver's Red Rocks Park back in January of 2014, when we still called it a Western Scrub-Jay.

Anyway, the name changed. We birders accepted it. The split made sense. And hey, another species for the life list, right? Kind of awkward name at first, after the ease of "Western." Easy to forget that apostrophe, too (even for me, a guy with one in his last name). But OK, fine. We moved on.

In retrospect, it seems astonishing now. The bird science people put *another* 19th-century guy's name on a "new" species, barely five years before the current debate got rolling about renaming "birds-named-after-dead-white-guys." If the species split happened today, Colorado birders might be checklisting the Juniper Scrub-Jay, or maybe Inland or Southwestern or Interior. Even Western again!

But this isn't about the bird-name debate. I'm only wondering: Why "Woodhouse" and not someone or something else? Oddly, I couldn't find a thing online to explain that.

To be fair, **Samuel Washington Woodhouse** (1821-1904) was a part-time bird guy of note. As physician and naturalist on a couple of pre-Civil War expeditions around the Southwest, he made the first bird survey of Oklahoma Territory and was "the first naturalist to survey the Arizona region," too. In Texas, he even discovered and described the first Cassin's Sparrow (he named it to honor his friend **John Cassin**, curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia).

No mention of scrub-jays, though. Woodhouse's travels probably made him scrub-jay *adjacent*. But I could find only a single, indirect reference. An **Edward Bowers** painting of Woodhouse in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery carries this vague and unattributed description: "He discovered several hitherto unknown specimens, including a toad (*Bufo woodhousii*) and a bird (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) that are named after him." If you say so, anonymous painting-describer. But I'm not yet convinced of the discovery part.

Does it matter? Not really. If the AOS has its way, "Woodhouse" will be gone one day, perhaps soon. Personally, I'd call the species Sagebrush or Southwestern Scrub-Jay. But names, as we can see, are sometimes fleeting. I'll celebrate the scrub-jay we have here: Woodhouse's for now, but ours forever.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations



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The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Thursday, Oct. 31, 2024





**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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individually via the
[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Feathered friends, never before seen, make a magic New Mexico moment



Sharon Tinianow

In mid-September I spent a long weekend in historic Taos, NM. A group of us, all women, traditionally go off to the mountains once a year for a fall weekend of relaxation and silly fun. This year, for the first time, we drove four-plus hours away from Denver to stay in a historic adobe house in northern New Mexico's famed artists' colony.

As the only birder in the group, I checked eBird for any hotspots nearby. The [Rio Fernando Wetlands](#) were just a mile from where we were staying. On a cool Saturday morning, I set off alone to see what I could see there. The walking route took me past "unimproved" land managed by the [Taos Pueblo](#). I stopped from time to time to watch American Goldfinch, Song Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warblers foraging in the fields. Red-winged Blackbirds were forming up into flocks. A variety of other common birds interrupted my trek.

I entered Rio Fernando de Taos, which comprises about 30 wetland acres on the southwest side of town, from adjacent Fred Baca Park. A quarter-mile-long boardwalk trail took me around the wetlands' edge. I had it all to myself! Listening for more birds as I walked, I stopped now and then

for a better look. Wilson's Warblers, a default autumn migrant along Colorado's Front Range and down through New Mexico, seemed to be everywhere. I saw both Mountain Chickadees and Black-capped, too.

Arriving at an area of open water surrounded by reedy cattails, I stopped for a bit. My eye was soon drawn to a largeish bird in the water, wrestling a dragonfly into submission. Yellow legs and a short yellow bill, buffy in color with white speckles on its back and wings. But the plumage? I consulted my Merlin phone app, which showed me pictures. And there it was: a juvenile Sora! I could not believe my luck. I had heard Sora call many times from marshes but had never actually seen one.

I was only about 15 feet away from it, and the bird seemed oblivious to me. I stayed still to enjoy the scene as long as I could, as my only camera was on my cellphone, and the only image it can take is too small to capture the moment.

A few moments later, a second bird waded out from the reeds. As I looked closer, I knew it wasn't another Sora. This was larger, with a longer, reddish-orange beak and reddish legs, too. I looked at Merlin again and noted the gray cheek and black stripes behind the legs. I couldn't believe it: a Virginia Rail! Another species I'd heard but never seen.

At this point, I wouldn't have been surprised if Big Foot tapped me on the shoulder. Seeing just one of these notoriously secretive birds in the field would've made my day. Two foraging together was a miracle! Clearly, this morning was magical, even if both species breed in New Mexico and in this particular wetland, too.

Eventually, the birds wandered back into the reeds — and I realized I'd been holding my breath the whole time. What a blessing to have seen them on such a postcard-beautiful New Mexico morning. How very fortunate for us that the Town of Taos set aside this land and protected it from development to serve as habitat for so many species of birds and wildlife.

Continued on page 6



I continued down to where the boardwalk ended at a viewing platform. Not inundated with water, the low shrubs were filled with songbirds foraging. I heard the familiar *witchity-witchity* of a Common Yellowthroat, which popped up on a nearby bush a moment later. Hummingbirds darted around, never close enough for me to identify beyond “Not a male Broad-tailed Hummingbird.” A flock of Chipping Sparrows bounced past the platform and an Eastern Kingbird made an appearance, as did many more common species.

Hunger drove me back to the house, where our designated morning-shift crew was cooking and serving brunch. Curious about my outing, my non-birding friends expressed at least polite appreciation as I told of seeing the two marsh waders. Or maybe they weren't just polite. The next morning, several of them joined me for the one-mile trek back to Rio Fernando. Although they didn't have binoculars, they were as awed as I was by the number of birds and the landscape views from the boardwalk trail.

That special experience reminded me again that we all need time in nature. When cities and towns can set aside natural areas like that one, we benefit almost as much as the wildlife that depend on the habitat afforded by that protection.

Good autumn birding, everyone!

— **Sharon**

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: GEESE AND SWANS ON OCT. 17

With autumn's arrival come the large waterfowl that spend the winter in Colorado. The timing's perfect for DFO's next bird ID mini-webinar, BIRD BOMBS: Eyes on Geese and Swans on **Oct. 17, 7 p.m. MDT**. Explore the identification of Colorado's several species of geese and two kinds of swans with **David Suddjian**. Helpful past episodes for the fall birding season are available in [DFO's BIRD BOMBS video library](#) online, including [Falling for Warblers](#), [Prairie Hawks](#), [Forest Hawks](#), [Fall Sparrows](#), [Looking at Loons](#) and [Colorado Sea Ducks](#).

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS



FIELD TRIP REMINDER: CARPOOLS + COST SHARING

After learning of confusion among some participants in out-of-town Denver Field Ornithologists field trips, Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** passes along this reminder about DFO's carpool cost-sharing guidance and reasoning: "Some field trips require carpooling with volunteer drivers so that we can lessen our effect on the environment, simplify trip logistics with fewer vehicles, and improve the quality of the

trip experience. DFO recommends mileage reimbursement to volunteer carpool drivers of 50 cents a mile, divided among the number of riders. It is also optional, at the driver's discretion, to reduce the amount each rider is asked to pay. But carpool riders should come prepared to reimburse their driver at the end of the field trip. As a further reminder, this information is always available at the top of the DFO website's ["Upcoming Field Trips"](#) page.

DFO VOLUNTEERS TRIBUTE IS OCT. 19 AT ARSENAL

This year's Denver Field Ornithologists' Volunteer Appreciation Day celebration is set again for the visitor center at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. This gathering on **Saturday, Oct. 19 from 10 a.m. to noon MDT** will feature coffee-break snacks and beverages, presentation of several club awards for volunteerism, and a live-animal program with "Colorado Native" species by Nature's Educators, Colorado's own wildlife education outreach organization. In the 89 years since our organization was founded in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club, DFO has functioned solely because of the contributions of time and energy from dedicated volunteers. This second annual event is in tribute to field trip leaders, Hawk Watch volunteers, behind-the-scenes tech helpers, program managers, board and committee members and the club's officers. To attend, volunteers must register themselves and up to one guest on the DFO website's [special events pages](#).

BIRD CONSERVANCY'S "NIGHT FOR BIRDS" IS OCT. 18

The annual "A Night for the Birds" fundraiser of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is set for Friday, Oct. 18, 6-9 p.m. in the Denver Museum of Nature + Science. This year the conservancy marks 36 years of tireless work to conserve birds and their habitats with educational programs, cutting-edge science in field and lab, land stewardship, and connection building between humans and birds. The event includes complimentary drinks and *hors d'oeuvres*, games, live and silent auctions and more. Auctioneer **Jennifer Clifford** from Beyond the Call Auctions returns again to help the conservancy meet its fundraising goal of \$150,000. Tickets are \$60 per person.

PURCHASE TICKETS

Continued on page 8



FIELD TRIPS CHIEF TEACHING TWO MORE BIRDING CLASSES

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair and creator of the popular “BIRD BOMBS” bird ID mini-webinars, is offering two more bird identification classes through Front Range Birding Company in Littleton in November and December. **“In Focus: Winter Waterfowl Warm Up”** begins with an evening class **Wednesday, Nov. 13** at the Littleton store, followed by two Saturday field trips **Nov. 23** (half day) and **Nov. 30** (full day). The following month, **“In Focus: Winter Raptor Hawk ID + More”** starts with an evening instructional **Wednesday, Dec. 4**, followed by Saturday field trips **Dec. 6** (half day) and **Dec. 13** (full day).

The November course will focus on the 31 species of Colorado ducks, geese and swans that migrate through the state or return here for winter beginning that month. The December course will explore a variety of winter-season hawks, eagles and falcons found both along roads and in protected areas. Each course costs \$160 per person, with a limit of 11 participants. For more info or to register, call Front Range Birding at 303-979-2473.

COLO PROBES CONDOR DEATH AS POACHING OFFENSE

The death of a rare California Condor in southwestern Colorado last spring is being investigated as an act of deliberate poaching, a federal offense because the species is “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act. The bird’s carcass was found in late March, a day after someone shot it the remote area west of McPhee Reservoir and northeast of tiny Lewis, CO in north-central Montezuma County.

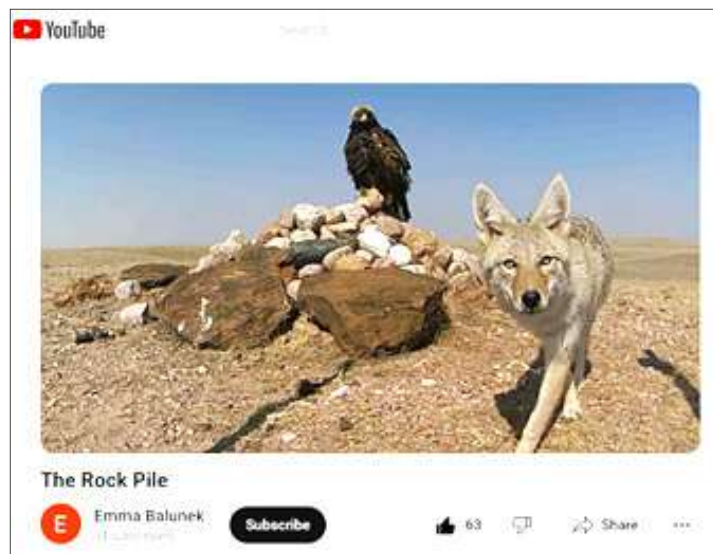
Investigators for Colorado Parks & Wildlife and US Fish & Wildlife Service are hoping the public can provide further leads in pursuing the offender. Read the full story in the Denver online e-newspaper [The Colorado Sun](#).



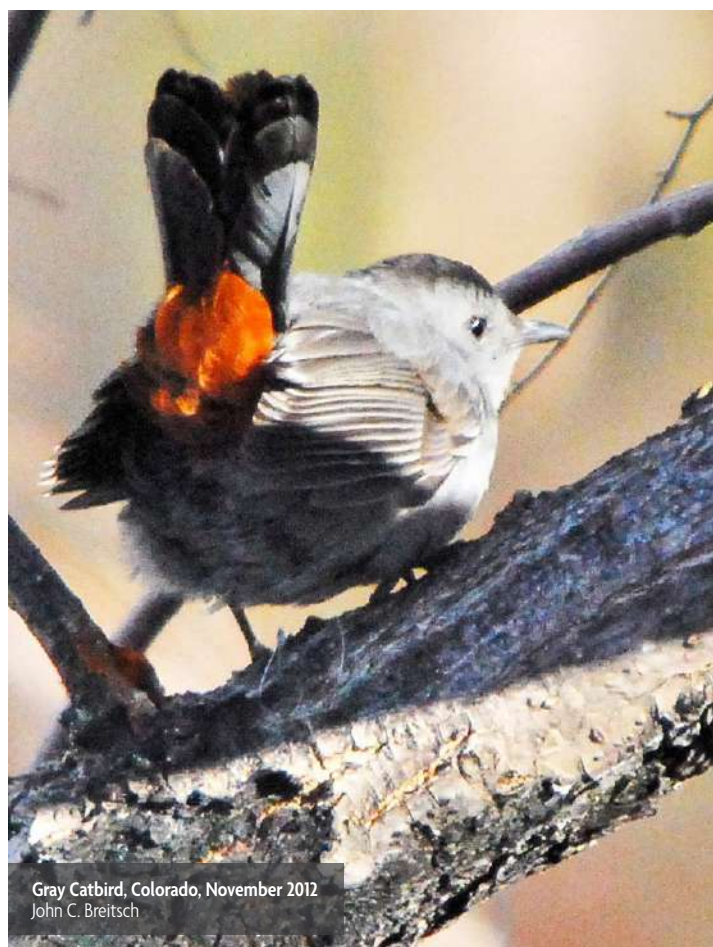
“ROCK PILE”: COLORADO PRAIRIE LIFE SPECTACLE

A University of Nebraska graduate student’s 5-year project to record wildlife visits to a simple pile of prairie rocks in northeastern Colorado is now a poetic and mesmerizing [5-minute video on YouTube](#). **Emma Balunek** has photographed the spot with remote, time-lapse and motion-detection cameras since 2019 to capture what could be lost to creeping development east of the northern Front Range. She recorded her remarkable video just inside the west edge of Pawnee National Grasslands, and in all manner of conditions: Sunrise, sunset, total darkness, wind, snow, rain and flying insects. And her footage includes a wide array of prairie creatures: badger, fox, coyote, jackrabbit, raccoon, Bald and Golden eagles, Ferruginous, Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks, Horned Lark, Rock Wren, Sage Thrasher, mice, prairie dogs, Common Raven, shrikes, Western Meadowlark, pronghorn and more.

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Balunek calls the video both “The Rock Pile” and “Prairie Crossroads” on her YouTube posting. She is also chronicling her field work for broader prairie ecosystem conservation storytelling on a [separate project website](#). Read the full story of Balunek and “The Rock Pile” on [KUNC-FM public radio’s website](#).



Welcome to new DFO members

Robert Dion Carmona and **Pamela Carmona**, Des Plaines, IL; **Joshua Koerner** and **Lillian Koerner**, Highlands Ranch; **Reagan Sanford**, Commerce City

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Tolline Gallagher; **Beth Harkins**; **Roger Koester**, in memory of **John C. Breitsch**; **Patrick O'Driscoll**, in memory of John C. Breitsch

Friends of DFO

Roger Koester (2); **Elissa McAlear**; **Mary Beth Searles** (2); **Patrick O'Driscoll**, in memory of John C. Breitsch

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Sharon Kelly; **Michael Lupini** and **Janet Peters**, in memory of **Debi Tipton**





Matthew Young with Redpolls
Melissa Groo

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*

Matthew A. Young
Monday, Oct. 28, 2024
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

What makes a finch a finch? A heavy, conical bill meant for cracking open seeds, right? Not so fast, says **Matthew A. Young**, one of the nation's foremost researchers into the finch branches of the avian family tree. It's more complicated than that. Remember Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands? Turns out they're actually tanagers.

Bill size and shape are "no longer the case with taxonomy," says Young, president and founder of the [Finch Research Network](#) and an expert in the many calls of the Red Crossbill, another finch family member. Young will discuss all this and more in DFO's October evening program, "Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*," scheduled for **Oct. 28 at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom** webinar

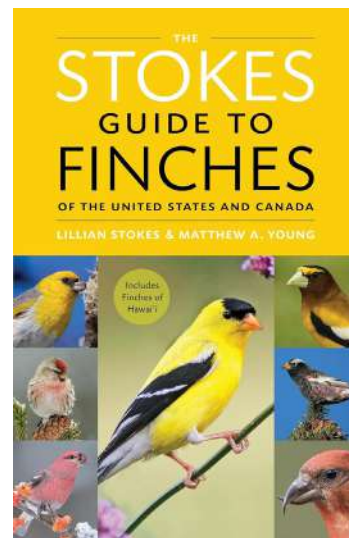
Young is co-author of that new *Stokes* guide, due out in mid-September. "There is no guide to finches for the United States, if you can believe it," he notes. He's also the audio engineer behind much of the bird call and song recordings for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin Bird ID app. He has worked for Cornell on and off for 15 years of an eclectic career that also includes extensive (and current) employment as a social worker with special-needs adolescents and young adults.

He also works with the Rosy Finch Working Group, which he says "is looking into how climate change may play a big role in the future of rosy finches." And he is co-leader of the International Evening Grosbeak Working Group, which is "trying to figure out what led to a 92% decline" in the species in the past 50 years.

Atop all that, Young also studies bogs, fens and orchids. (He founded and is president of the Native Orchid Conservation Network.)

Young has observed and enjoyed nature since early childhood. He first marveled at finches after moving to Yellowstone NP for a summer host job at a park hotel. As he stood at the iconic Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River, "a flock of birds flew in above me and started feeding. It was Red Crossbills. It was the spark — not a spark bird, but a moment in life that shifted my whole being."

He earned his bachelor's degree in water resources and master's in ornithology at two branches of SUNY, the State University of New York. He currently teaches an introductory birding class at Cornell. He was also an adjunct professor in environmental studies at SUNY-Cortland, and he has served as board chair of The Wetland Trust. Young was a regional editor for 10 years with *The Kingbird*, quarterly journal of the New York Ornithological Society.





Jessie Reese banding birds in Colombia

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

American Dipper: A Magical Mountain Friend

Jessie Reese
Monday, Nov. 25, 2024
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

With its constant diving, bobbing and rock-hopping in shallow rapids, the aptly named American Dipper is an unusual passerine. No wonder it evokes such delight when we encounter it. Coloradans are fortunate to have abundant dipper habitat along our mountain streams and urban and suburban creeks along the Front Range and west.

DFO's November evening program, "The American Dipper: A Magical Mountain Friend" (**Monday, Nov. 25, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**), will explore dipper ecology and the adaptations that make the unique lifestyle of this chunky little bird possible. Guest speaker **Jessie Reese**, a senior avian ecologist with the [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#), will also examine dippers' distribution on the Front Range, including migration and movements from high country and foothills down to urban areas in winter. The timing of Reese's presentation couldn't be better for us: Stand by for dippers soon!

Reese has studied birds and their habitats for the past 15 years in numerous far-flung places, from the swamps of Virginia and meadows of Yosemite Valley to Pacific islands and Amazon jungles. She earned her master's in science from Virginia Commonwealth University, traveling from there to Panama and Colombia to study migratory connectivity (how closely birds follow direct trajectories to common migration destinations) in Prothonotary Warblers.

In grad school, Reese developed a passion for ecological restoration, which led to a job with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources helping landowners manage their forests to benefit Appalachian species like Cerulean and Golden-winged warbler. After moving to Colorado in 2019, she joined the conservancy's Stewardship program, running a team of biologists working to help landowners manage shortgrass prairie for grassland birds.

Returning to her scientific roots, Reese now manages the conservancy's program of multi-species avian point counts (single-observer, sight-and-sound bird counts at fixed locations for specified periods) in Wyoming and the southern Great Plains. When not tramping around in the field counting birds, she co-leads the redevelopment of the conservancy's Rocky Mountain Avian Data Center, a web portal with access to population trends and other data for more than 300 bird species.



American Dipper
Frank D. Lospalluto/
Creative Commons

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's September program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on Zoom. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



SEPTEMBER 23

The State of Birding, Version 2024.9 Ted Floyd

Colorado birding free thinker, guidebook author and avian journalist **Ted Floyd** begins this Zoom update on the state of birding with a just-now twist. On the screen is his same-day photo of a friend stalking an “everywhere right now” fall-migrant Wilson’s Warbler in [Greenlee Wildlife Preserve](#), Floyd’s home patch in Lafayette. From that thin first thread, Floyd (longtime editor of *Birding* magazine) weaves an hour-long, free-range conversation across numerous current bird topics:

The species-renaming debate (including that warbler’s namesake, “father of American ornithology” **Alexander Wilson**). Spectrograms of birdsong and cricket chirps. Bird checklists handwritten and apped on handheld devices. The northward march of Black-chinned Hummingbirds. Forty-year flashbacks (Ted’s “plain as day” teen memory of a Wilson’s Warbler in Pennsylvania). And finally, the Shakespearean question: To Merlin or NOT to Merlin? THAT is the question — and Ted has answers, from “Trust, but verify” to “It can only get better.”

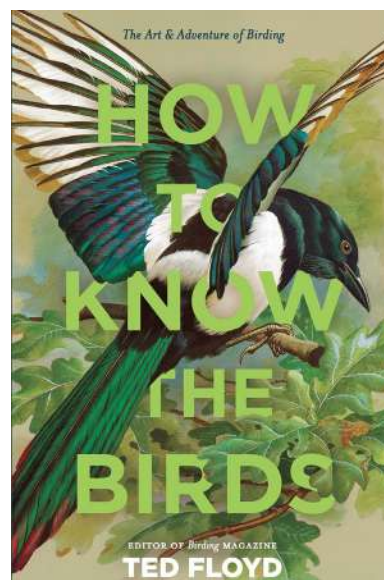
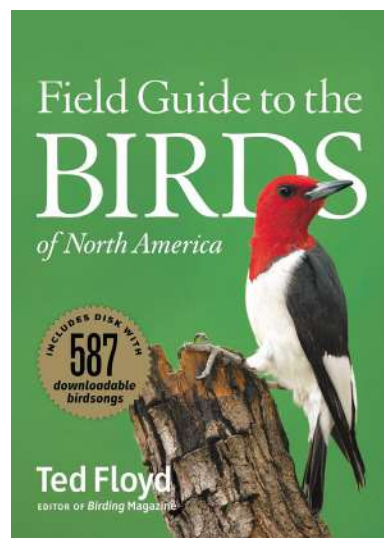
Listen closely. Although Ted Floyd’s a nonstop talker, every bit of this program is entertaining — and enlightening.

WATCH ONLINE



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website’s [Past Programs](#) page.





Feeding a patient
at Greenwood Rehab
Jill Boice



Western Grebe under care
Greenwood Wildlife

DFO GRANT FUND

Year-end giving? Grants fund helps science, research, education — even wildlife rehab

Jill Boice

As you renew your Denver Field Ornithologists membership this fall — or join for the first time, or return to the club after some time away — please consider a donation to [DFO's Research, Conservation & Education Fund](#).

Each year, DFO makes grants to projects in three general categories: Bird-related research, education about birds, and conservation of birds and their habitat. That last category can even include on-the-ground work in avian rehab, as you'll learn farther down in this article.

Donating is easy to do online while renewing or starting your membership, and year's end is an ideal time to make a tax-deductible gift. If you specify your contribution for the grants fund, that's where the money will go. (DFO has two other funds, for the Hawk Watch community science project, and the Friends of DFO Fund for general club expense needs.)

Recent grants have ranged from about \$800 to \$2,000 and have helped college ornithology student research, local birding habitat development and review, and community development of birding resources. The fund's 2024 recipients included projects for new interpretive nature signs on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County, additional elementary school visits with live raptors by Nature's Educators, and continuing Front Ranch research projects on chickadees, House Wrens and Loggerhead Shrikes. (You can read about [past grants fund awards since 1995](#) on the DFO website.)

Another of this year's recipients is the [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#) in Boulder County, which received \$2,000 for specialized medical products and food for small birds. In August, DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** and Grants Committee chair **Jill Boice** toured the busy center near Longmont. Greenwood's high level of compassion and commitment to the rehab and release of orphaned, sick and injured wildlife was abundantly evident.

Although several wildlife rehab facilities in Colorado work with injured raptors and larger mammals, few care for smaller birds. Sixty percent of Greenwood's patients are songbirds. During their tour, Sharon and Jill saw Evening Grosbeaks in an outdoor aviary, gaining strength for their upcoming release, and a pair of Blue Jays in the treatment room. Black-billed Magpies, Northern

Continued on page 14

Flickers, Mallards, American Robins and even a European Starling were in various stages of treatment. (The patients weren't all birds; raccoons and some very adorable young marmots were also in care, the latter having somehow come down from the mountains via car.)

Established in 1982 as an outgrowth of the local Humane Society, Greenwood became a separate nonprofit in 1993. Today, its 13 wildlife rehabilitators handle about 4,000 animals a year, aided by as many as 500 volunteers annually. Besides grant aid this year from DFO, the center holds fundraisers, runs a consignment thrift and art gallery in Boulder, and provides educational opportunities, internships and training on wildlife interaction. The [center website](#) also has advice about what to do if you find an injured bird or other animal.

DFO's grant support is distributed through a yearly funding cycle. Applications for 2025 grants are due on **Feb. 1, 2025**. Preference is given first to projects in the great Denver metro area, then the rest of Colorado's Front Range and beyond. Applications and guidelines are on the [DFO website](#).

After the deadline, the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Fund Committee will review applications and determine award amounts. The current committee includes chair Boice and members **Pat Cullen, Ginni Dickinson, David Hill, Mary Fran O'Connor** and **Elaine Wagner**. If you have any questions about the grants program, you can contact Boice at jill@booksandcats.net.

Jill Boice, a DFO member since 2001, chairs the club's Grants Committee and leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park

DFO NEWS

Autumn membership in DFO is FLOCKING AWESOME!

Sharon Tinianow

What makes belonging to Denver Field Ornithologists so awesome? Your modest annual membership dues enable our 89-year-old birding club to:

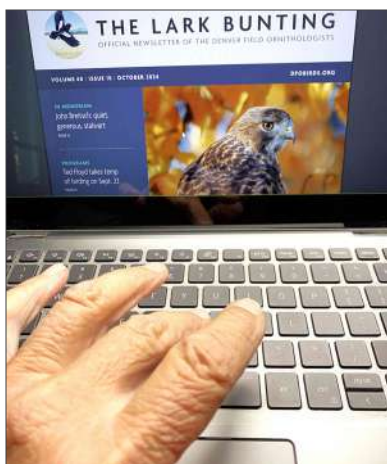
- Offer hundreds of FREE field trips year-round to Front Range destinations and beyond
- Present expert speakers at monthly programs at NO CHARGE eight times a year
- Continue to provide BIRD BOMBS, the popular short-burst webinars of bird ID information with **David Suddjian** via Zoom for FREE
- Maintain a website that makes registering for all of this easy, while also providing tons of useful information for Colorado birders, including recordings of past monthly programs and BIRD BOMBS
- Publish *The Lark Bunting* (quarterly beginning in 2025) and a new monthly e-newsletter to keep you up-to-date on what is happening at DFO

If that's not enough awesome for you, DFO is dedicated to keeping field trips and programs open to all, members or not. We want everyone to try out our awesome, then join the flock and discover the benefits of birding with Colorado's oldest bird-related organization.

Do your part for DFO by becoming a member, or renewing your membership. Members receive access to features in the Members Only section of the website, which include a member directory where you can decide how much of your personal information to share, and club business documents including DFO Board minutes and financial statements.

Joining in autumn also is awesome. When you sign up now (**after Oct. 1**), your membership includes bonus months for the rest of 2024 and runs through next year to Dec. 31, 2025. You can choose from an Individual Adult membership for \$30 or a Family membership (including all members of the same household) for \$45. Students under age 23 can join for just \$15.

Join our awesome flock today on the [DFO website](#), won't you? And if you're already a DFO member, keep the support coming. Renew NOW for uninterrupted benefits and access. Current memberships expire on **Dec. 31, 2024**. Thanks for joining, renewing and keeping DFO's flocking awesomeness going!



DFO VOLUNTEERISM

A new treasurer in 2025? DFO's looking for one, and more — come help us!

Patrick O'Driscoll

It takes the work of many volunteers to make our club go. Several immediate volunteer needs are listed below — but we have also begun searching for someone to help in a key DFO role beginning next year.

DFO Treasurer **Kathy Holland** will finish her service in spring 2025. Do you have general bookkeeping skills and a knack for tracking income and expenditures? If so, a small nonprofit organization called Denver Field Ornithologists can use your help. Here are the basic particulars.

The treasurer does not need to be a professional accountant, but DFO seeks someone organized, analytical and with some knowledge of budgeting. Familiarity and experience with QuickBooks accounting software will be helpful, too. Transition will require some time for one-on-one sessions with Kathy, so we seek candidates now or as soon as possible. If this interests you, or if you'd like more information, please contact DFO Nominations chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com or 303-981-8823.

Now, for our continuing need for DFO volunteers. We thank those of you who have stepped forward to ask: How can I help? We have several specific answers below, but DFO is also open to volunteer service in whatever way you think you can help. Whether it's a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless.

Here are several priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com for more details. And if you're got a talent or skill that you think DFO can use, let Phil know that, too, won't you?

NEWSLETTER AND MONTHLY DIGEST ASSISTANT

You'll help compile and write short items and "blurbs" about DFO events, programs, club news and people for *The Lark Bunting*, our periodic newsletter and the DFO Monthly Digest email update. Basic writing ability is a plus, but your interest and ideas about what to write and show are a double-plus

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISER

DFO needs a member with "techie" background, and knowledge and interest in online streaming and event recording (audio-video), to help present programs and conduct meetings and webinars

ASSISTANT PROGRAMS MANAGER

Working with DFO Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, this volunteer helps develop and arrange DFO's monthly evening programs in spring and fall, and helps write and post notices, articles and links to promote these Zoom-based presentations on our social media and newsletter

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTER (COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEE)

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO's Facebook, Instagram and other social media, your role could be intermittent, on an as-needed basis. We also seek expertise in helping DFO develop a strategic plan for our social media communications

MILESTONES

Bluff Lake @ 30: from airport crash zone to bird-rich nature preserve

Jason B. Bidgood

Bluff Lake Nature Center in northeast Denver recently announced its 30-year anniversary. Wow! Even as an early resident of the Central Park neighborhood that now surrounds it, I wasn't aware that this bird-friendly preserve existed until a few years after I moved there in 2004.

Even then, it was hard to imagine a nature center in what was essentially a construction zone. Bluff Lake was a wide and undeveloped spot along Sand Creek, itself an unloved trickle through a largely industrial corridor. For half a century, the lake lay unknown and unused inside Stapleton International Airport. Then the airfield closed in 1994 with the opening of Denver International Airport. Soon, plans to transform the old airport into a flourishing neighborhood with parks and businesses allowed Bluff Lake to fulfill its potential as the nature center it is today.

Bluff Lake's origins date back more than a century. It was built in the late 1800s as a large irrigation pond for surrounding farmland. When the growing city sought to expand nearby Denver Municipal Airport in the 1940s, the city aviation department acquired the lake as part of the expansion. And there it sat, fenced off in the "crash zone" at the end of one of Stapleton's runways.

The 123-acre site we know today as [Bluff Lake Nature Center](#) was negotiated as part of a legal settlement in 1994. The Sierra Club had sued Denver's Department of Aviation for environmental damage to Sand Creek caused by discharges of toxic aircraft-deicing fluids from inadequate retention ponds. Under the settlement, the city agreed to preserve the Bluff Lake area and pay \$3 million to enhance wildlife habitat, restore the banks of Sand Creek, and build an interpretive trail system with open-air shelters.

By 2000, basic infrastructure was in place, and on the surface, little has changed since. In 2008, the city transferred ownership of the property to the nonprofit Bluff Lake Nature Center. Today, from sunrise to sunset every day of the year, it's a hub of nature programs, after-school activities, summer camps, first-Saturday bird walks and self-guided enjoyment of nature. Denver Field Ornithologists has joined in the appreciation of Bluff Lake, having led almost 30 field trips there over the past decade (and possibly more before that).

Continued on page 17



Golden-crowned Sparrow at Bluff Lake
Jason B. Bidgood



Participants on a Bluff Lake bird walks scan from the boardwalk
Jason B. Bidgood



American Dipper, surprise find in Bluff Lake's Sand Creek in February 2016
Jason B. Bidgood

Current visitors may be unaware that before 2017, it was typical for Bluff Lake to dry up in the summer. Its sole sources of water are precipitation and storm runoff from the nearby neighborhood. But the lake's dam, more than a century old, could no longer contain the waters. After several years of planning and fundraising, the dam was rebuilt in 2016. Anecdotally, the leaky dam made Bluff Lake a better birding hotspot for shorebirds because there was commonly more shoreline mud than water. The birding tradeoff is that now in late summer, you're more likely to see Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots on the lake (with their young) as well as Black-crowned Night Herons along the water's edge.

That year was also about the time I started birding and visiting Bluff Lake more frequently — and I've seen some of my most memorable life birds there since. On a walk one unusually warm February afternoon in 2016, I was surprised to find an American Dipper in Sand Creek. Four years later, two months into the COVID-19 shutdown, I chased an American Bittern one evening just before dark in April 2020.

Chases for other rarities likely introduced many Denver birders to Bluff Lake. Did you see the Wild Turkey that showed up in July 2017 and stayed around for several years? Perhaps the Green Heron in summer 2018, or the Magnolia Warbler in May 2020? And then there are the Golden-crowned Sparrows that have been found (usually in the same spot) for each of the past three winters.

Regardless of how they come to know Bluff Lake, birders keep coming back. The center has become Denver County's top eBird hotspot in the number of both checklists and bird species recorded in the past few years. It is now approaching 6,000 checklists, almost twice as many as the city's second most popular hotspot, Denver City Park.

And if you still haven't been birding at Bluff Lake, what are you waiting for? It's easy to find, easy to get around, and a great place to spend a morning or afternoon. Come join me!

Jason B. Bidgood, a DFO member since 2016, is an environmental engineer / project manager for a federal contractor. He has led DFO field trips and Bluff Lake Nature Center bird walks as a volunteer since 2022. When not birding, he can often be found at his local climbing gym or out for a run



Wild Turkey that found its way onto Bluff Lake property and stayed for several years
Jason B. Bidgood



1942 view of Bluff Lake as irrigation pond
Bluff Lake Nature Center.



1953 view of Stapleton Airport with
Bluff Lake crash zone at far right
Bluff Lake Nature Center.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

September DFO trips *In Focus*

Early fall migration DFO field trips in September 2024 included 14 outings where participants took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 89-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in October, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the issue of *The Lark Bunting* due out in November.

Action shots of birders are preferred, but posed group pictures are acceptable, too. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline is last day of the month — **Thursday, Oct. 31** for the next issue. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people* for this feature, please. Thanks!

SEPTEMBER 1

Northeastern Colorado (Washington, Logan, Morgan, Weld counties)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Winston Liu, Steve Hebert, Norman Erthal, Dave Prentice, Christopher Curwen, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Joe Chen, Liza and Ajit Antony, Laura Hollenbaugh, Mark Amershek, Courtney Rella, Andrea Duran, Patricia Cullen, Thomas Forre, Archer Silverman, Tim Smart, Lillian Koerner

Joey Kellner (left-center, at scope) at Prewitt State Wildlife Area on Sept. 1 with some of the 19 birders he led on his annual fall migration field trip to northeastern Colorado
(Mark Amershek)



SEPTEMBER 2

Louviers + Dupont Open Space (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Kris Saucke, Julia Gwinn, Lynn Sauer, Ann Christensen, Mary Ramsey, Cindy Bouldin

Group shot of DFO field trippers on very birdy visit Sept. 2 to Douglas County village of Louviers and DuPont Open Space
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 19

SEPTEMBER 3

Ponderosa Preserve, Aurora (Adams)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Cestkowski, Amy Manning, Catherine Millard,
Kevin Millard, Christina Jeske, Brady Anderson,
Cindy Bouldin, Phil Waltz, Kris Tita

Birders on DFO's 10th species-survey field trip Sept. 3
inside Aurora's restricted-access Ponderosa Preserve
Cynthia Cestkowski



SEPTEMBER 5

Chatfield SP (Douglas, Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Alice Tariot, Sarah Feigelson, Nadiyah
Watts, Chip Dawes, Nathan Crow, Kathy Johnson

Crossing the grasslands in Chatfield State Park on Sept. 5
field trip that found two Long-tailed Jaegers
(Nadiyah Watts)



SEPTEMBER 8

Louviers + DuPont Open Space (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Kathy Kunce, Susan Shetterly, Ryan Corda, Scott Hammel,
Debby Miller, Mindy and David Densmore

Birders on outskirts of village of Louviers in
Douglas County on Sept. 8 field trip
(Mindy Densmore)



Continued on page 20



SEPTEMBER 13
Aurora Reservoir
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Carly Crow

Participants
Ryan Corda, John Batt, Andrea Duran, Cynthia Cestkowski, Nathan Crow, Catherine Millard, Christopher Curwen, Debby Miller

DFO birders scan Aurora Reservoir
during field trip on Sept. 13
(Debby Miller)

SEPTEMBER 15
First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch
(Jefferson)

Leaders
Patrick O'Driscoll and Felice Lyons

Participants
John Batt, Meg Reck, Julia Auckland, Rosanne Juergens, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle, Michael Fernandez, Jackie Nelsen, Mary Onstot, Mary Keithler, Lynn Slaga, Susan Blansett

Birders on memorial DFO trip Sept. 15 to the late John Breitsch's patch at First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



SEPTEMBER 16
Chico Basin Ranch
(El Paso, Pueblo)

Leader
Jessica Miller

Participants
Bonnie Prado, Holly Winters Deppe, Ryan Corda, Steve Hebert, John Batt, John Rising, Jon Deppe, Kathy Barnum, Dale Stevens, Melissa Wetzig, Linda Cunico

Field trippers scan Headquarters Pond at Chico Basin Ranch on
Sept. 16 DFO outing during the ranch's short fall birding season
(Steve Hebert)

Continued on page 21



SEPTEMBER 18

**Audubon Kingery Nature Center,
Chatfield SP
(Jefferson)**

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Coreen Spellman, Ryan Corda, Nancy Donovan,
Dave Prentice, Becky Russell, Gigi Zarzuela

All eyes up into the trees for pewees on DFO field trip Sept. 18
to Kingery Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield State Park
(Gigi Zarzuela)

SEPTEMBER 22

**Denver City Park
(Denver)**

Leaders

Patrick O'Driscoll and Archer Silverman

Participants

Lisa Seiler, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Steve Methven,
Sandra Hoyle, Julia Auckland, Heidi Letko

First-day-of-fall birders focus skyward during
Denver City Park field trip Sept. 22
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



SEPTEMBER 22

**Birds + Nature Journaling,
Barr Lake SP
(Adams)**

Leader

Carly Crow

Participants

Jennifer Tonge, Matthew Hazelgren, Paula Rosson

Participants in Birds + Nature Journaling field trip Sept. 22
at Barr Lake State Park pose with their handiwork
(Carly Crow)



Continued on page 22

SEPTEMBER 23

Birds + History, Louviers + DuPont Open Space (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Debby Miller, Virginia Gulakowski, Phil Waltz, Sarah Feigelson,
Jeanne Dillon, John Batt, Bonnie Prado, Cynthia Cestkowski

Birds + History field trippers Sept. 23 in village of Louviers community
center for Historic Douglas County Inc. presentation on the 116-year-old
former company town for a DuPont dynamite plant
(Debby Miller)



SEPTEMBER 26

Birds + Bird Photography, Chatfield SP (Jefferson, Douglas)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants

Steve Hebert, Kris Saucke, Jim and Linda Mann,
Matthew Hazelgren, Kathy Kunce, Lynn Sauer,
Annette Aguero, Ginger Okada, Dick Prickett

Early morning scan for Sabine's Gulls on Sept. 26
Birds + Bird Photography field trip to Chatfield State Park
(Dave Prentice)



SEPTEMBER 29

Cherry Creek SP (Arapahoe)

Leaders

David Tønnessen and David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Virginia Gulakowski, Nadiyah Watts,
Taylor Xavier, Lisa Seiler, Kathy Johnson, Andrea Duran

Pausing on the path during Sept. 29 outing to Cherry Creek State Park,
David Tønnessen's first as a field trip leader
(David Suddjian)





Mike Fernandez and Pat O'Driscoll at DFO booth

DFO OUTREACH

Flying the DFO flag at Barr Lake's annual birding festival

Isabelle Busch

Early birds landed in force at Barr Lake State Park the morning of Sept. 14 for the park's annual Fall Birding Festival. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, whose headquarters is inside the park, led the migration-focused gathering outside the Barr Lake Nature Center with guided bird walks, tours of the conservancy's banding station, and nature journaling sessions.

Hundreds of park visitors, many brand new to birding, flocked to an inviting outdoor alley of canopy-shaded booths featuring live birds from Nature's Educators and bird-oriented displays, among them Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Wild Birds Unlimited, Denver Audubon, the Leave No Trace outdoor ethics movement, and, of course, Denver Field Ornithologists.

DFO's information table, staffed by Communications & Outreach chair **Mike Fernandez** and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, featured club information: handouts and links, Q-and-A for potential new members, promotion of DFO's free field trips, and a highly popular book giveaway. From the dozens of guidebooks, reference works, and other bird-related volumes, I chose a lovely Sibley guide. The books were among hundreds bequeathed to the club this summer by DFO trip leader and gifted birder **John Breitsch**, who died in August.

Nature's Educators, which presents live raptors up close for audiences at schools and events like the festival, arrived with three avian ambassadors. "It is really exciting for us to be here with people who are already super motivated," said program specialist **Rebeca Reyes**, who handled **Zelda** the Prairie Falcon.

Festivalgoers also saw live birds being tagged at the conservancy's banding station, where DFO vice president **Charlie Chase**, himself an ornithologist, assisted with the operation. Eastern Colorado lies within the Central Flyway, an aerial highway for birds heading north in spring and south in fall. Local habitats like Barr Lake are important stopovers where migrants build fat reserves necessary to fly hundreds and even thousands of miles. Although modern migration is often tracked with GPS, the classic technique of banding birds remains important.



Barr Lake Bird Festivalgoers listen to bird banding presentation
Isabelle Busch

Continued on page 24



Bird bander Meredith McBurney with Wilson's Warbler
Isabelle Busch



Zelda the Prairie Falcon at Nature's Educators booth
Isabelle Busch

BIRD FESTIVAL *cont from page 23*

"We're monitoring migratory songbirds so that we can conserve them," said **Meredith McBurney**, a 20-year veteran bander for the conservancy. Asked what's the most important part of her work, she replied, "Turning people onto birds. We're the gateway drug for birding."

Her banding demonstration definitely charmed **Joel Cross**, age 11, who held a newly-banded songbird in his cupped palms for a brief moment before it fluttered away. His reaction? "Wow, this is amazing!" A fifth grader from North Star Elementary School in Thornton, Cross was fascinated by how birds migrating through the park stop to just "fatten themselves up and then go."

Although the festival celebrates fall bird migration, spring may be a bigger season in Colorado. That's the case for raptors traveling north along the Front Range. Expert-led teams of DFO volunteers track and count birds of prey daily for 10 weeks on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. This annual Hawk Watch citizen science project lasts from March 1 to mid-May.

"What makes our Hawk Watch unique is not the sheer number of birds, but the variety of species," said Fernandez, himself a Hawk Watch volunteer who chatted with festival visitors about DFO's effort. He noted that spotters at Dinosaur Ridge record more than 20 species of hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures.

One more lesson at this year's festival was how eating enough to fuel long seasonal flights is vital to all migrating bird species. Natural habitats teem with insects, seeds, fruit and rodents, but what about urban and suburban areas? **Cacie Nickalaus**, a bird-friendly-gardening volunteer for the conservancy, said we can create food banks for birds that pass through our own yards.

"Native plants support insect communities better than ornamental plants do because they have co-evolved to exist together," she explained. "If we get enough people planting these pockets of habitat, it'll create really great corridors for birds to exist in year-round as well as for migratory stopovers."

As the morning-long birding festival reached its height, visitors looked up to admire, within a few minutes of each other, a Bald Eagle and a flock of American White Pelicans passing overhead. The shouts of excitement and delight were welcome signs of another year's success for the festival.

Isabelle Busch is an avid birder and nature journalist who moved from Washington this summer to Colorado, where she discovered DFO. Her graduate research at Colorado State University focuses on international bird conservation

DFO NEWS

DFO outreach at Arsenal festival, too



DFO promoted bird appreciation and conservation on Sept. 28 with a booth at Refuge Day, the annual festival of one of metro Denver's most popular birding destinations, [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#). Club president **Sharon Tinianow**, Communications & Outreach chair **Mike Fernandez**, and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** answered questions about field trips, taught children how to use binoculars, handed out club brochures and bird fact sheets, and gave away bird-related books and candy.

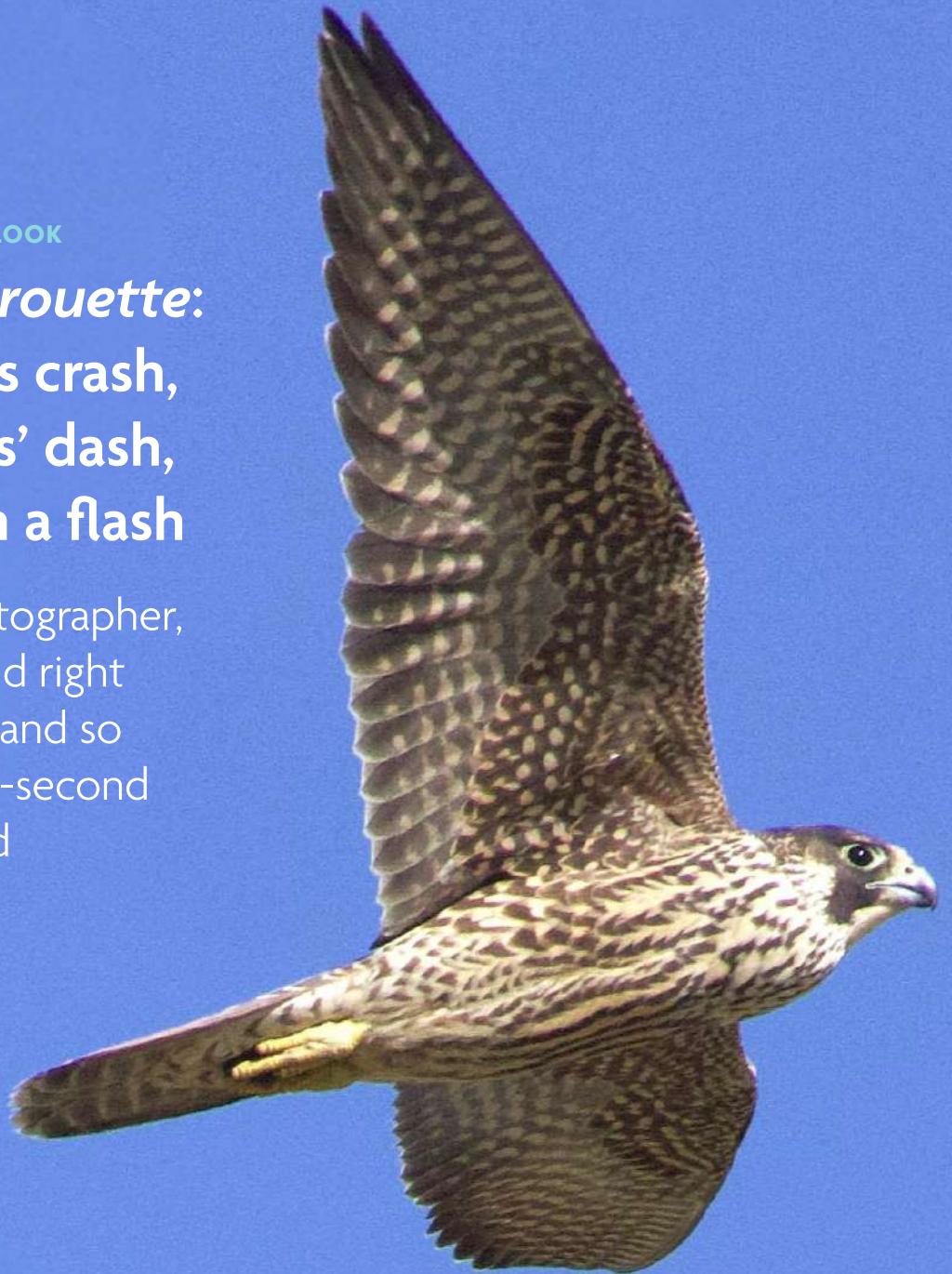
Photo by Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Prewitt *pirouette*: Peregrine's crash, shorebirds' dash, all gone in a flash

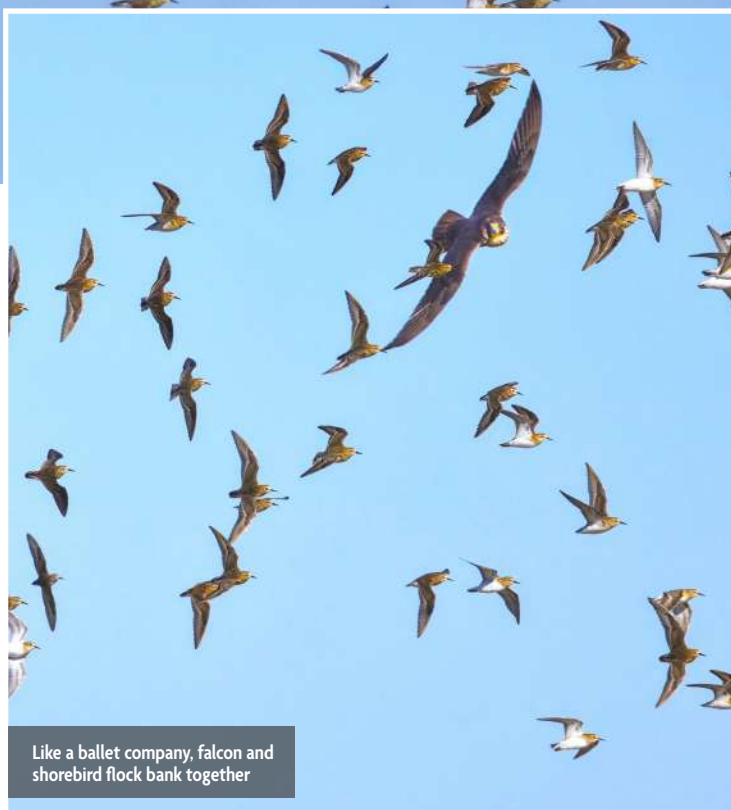
For DFO photographer,
right place and right
time help — and so
does 1/3200th-second
shutter speed

Photos by David Prentice





The sandpiper squadron takes flight, with falcon in pursuit



Like a ballet company, falcon and shorebird flock bank together



Aerial battle, or aeroballet?

Dave Prentice

We were checking out shorebirds at Prewitt when everything flushed . . . and instantly it became apparent why.

It was around 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 21, the last day of official summer. This was my fourth visit to [Prewitt Reservoir State Wildlife Area](#) in September. It's an amazing spot because of all the migrating shorebirds and land birds in fall — although there are also dove and duck hunters around, and those “friends” were sharing the same end of the reservoir. So that made it more challenging.

Winston Liu from Lafayette was with me. He's a very good birder and a photographer as well. We had decided to cross the inlet canal at the far south end of the reservoir and explore the small bay on the east side of the inlet. This required bringing our rubber boots along to get across, but it was definitely worth it.

There were at least 17 species of shorebirds being seen. We were specifically looking for the Marbled Godwit, Short-billed Dowitcher and American Golden Plover. At this point, we had found the godwit.

Continued on page 28

Winston and I were shooting photos of hundreds of shorebirds when they suddenly flushed. As if out of nowhere, a Peregrine Falcon flew in. It looked like every bird in the bay had flushed — hundreds of all different species. We estimated 200 Baird's Sandpipers alone.

I was shooting with a Canon R5, RF 100-500mm lens with 1.4 extender to 700mm. I quickly bumped the shutter speed up to 1/3200th-second as the Peregrine circled around a little before diving into the flying Baird's flock.

We didn't see it snatch any birds, and going through the photos later, it looked like the falcon had a full crop already. But it was so exciting to experience and to get these photos. The whole episode lasted only 30 seconds.

At first I was disappointed that the camera focused on the sandpipers and not the falcon. But I think it actually worked out better in telling the story — that the Peregrine is chasing from behind. My photos look like it was just the Baird's flock flying together, but I didn't look at every one, and I don't know "shorbs" that well.

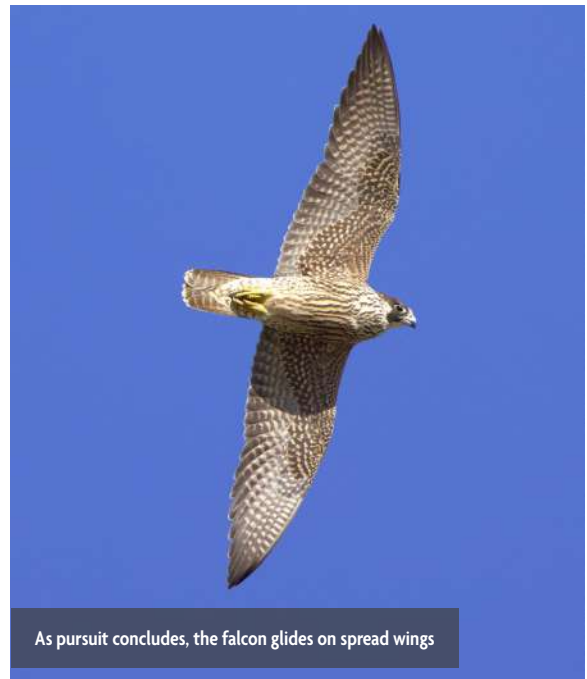
I do know that I took 250 photos in 30 seconds. So many to choose from! (Here is our [eBird checklist](#).)



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder / photographer for the past 10 years. A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field



Peregrine's dive-bomb ballet is ending



As pursuit concludes, the falcon glides on spread wings



Meanwhile, duck hunters waded in the same vicinity as shorebirding photographers



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY FALL BIRDING!

Peregrine Falcon flies off after aerial ballet
Sept. 21 with shorebirds over Prewitt Reservoir



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 12 | DECEMBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

PTARMIGAN AWARD

Longtimer Ira Sanders
wins DFO's top honor

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"Frequent flier" is
Rookie of the Year

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Can we talk? Join our
new Coffeehouse Chats

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LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

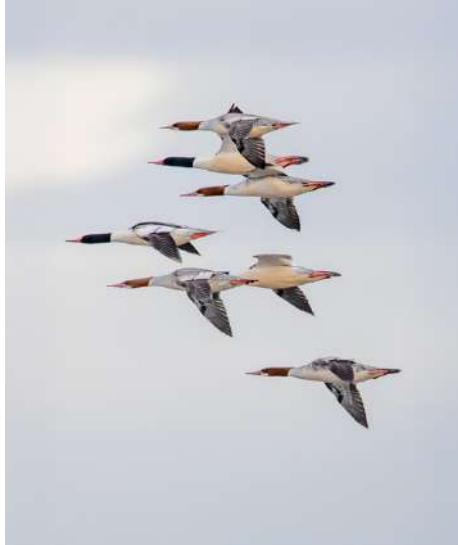
Pilgrimage to Pipit Hill:
in pursuit of Sprague's

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dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Common Mergansers
Rob Raker
Chatfield State Park, Douglas Co



ON THE COVER

Common Merganser: uncommon beauty on our winter waters

Patrick O'Driscoll

A Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) in flight — or on this month's cover, seven of them — is a wondrous sight. Their streamlined bodily extension, sleek and stretched to the limit, stage-whispers one word: *SPEED*. The ones in contributing photographer **Rob Raker's** photo (taken in January 2021 at Chatfield State Park) look like avian sprinters, leaning together for the tape in a photo finish.

It's unmistakable when one or a few of them whisks by overhead. They make me smile every time. The largest of North America's three mergansers is called a "sea duck" by the Cornell Lab's Birds of the World, but we're fortunate to have them here in Colorado, far from the ocean, during the fall-winter non-breeding season. We get few in spring and summer breeding season, too.



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the

world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography, rock-climbing and skiing.

One prolific female, somewhat famous locally, returned to Denver City Park every spring for at least five straight years to nest, including this year. The location of her tree cavity nest always escaped detection. She would turn up suddenly in late May on the park's Ferril Lake and adjacent Sediment Pond with a darling brood of 10-12 fuzzy ducklings. Park-goers thrilled as the young paddled single-file behind her, two or three riding on her back. The annual spectacle attested to the deep fidelity Common Merganser moms attach to nesting locations.

The ducklings were self-sufficient from the moment they reached water. But they were easy pickings for predators. The one or two that survived most years did so by growing too big to be swallowed by herons, fish and other dangers. Some years, no young made it. Twin pairs lived to fledge in 2023 and again this year.

Tragically, their mother became a victim herself last summer, somehow entangled in a sloppy angler's discarded fishing tackle. Despite well-meaning human attempts to rescue the ailing bird, she eluded their reach and nets. Within days, she lay dead in the lakeside grass, tied up in monofilament line with an orange fishing lure still attached. As if in tribute, her remaining two young tested their wings in late August and flew away to future adulthood.

Will one of them or another Common Merganser female return to City Park to carry on her tradition? It's doubtful but not impossible. She found City Park's urban island of habitat suitable for years, after all. Common Mergansers show up in winter from time to time. The dark-headed, red-billed merganser males and cinnamon-headed females are a striking contrast, diving for fish and crayfish amidst the park's winter flocks of Cackling Geese.

Fun fact: The species we sometimes call "merg" for short goes by a variety of nicknames across North America, from fish duck and sawbill to sheldrake and even "goosander." "Merganser" translates from Latin roughly as "plunging duck." I'll simply call the Common Merganser uncommonly beautiful.

***Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. In 2023, he received DFO's inaugural Peregrine Award for innovation*



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Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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individually via the
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ready for DFO face-to-face time again? Come join us for a “Coffeehouse Chat”

Sharon Tinianow

Those of you who attended our second Denver Field Ornithologists Volunteer Recognition Event on Oct. 19 (read the details on [page 13](#)) had that increasingly rare DFO experience — time to socialize with other birders, in person.

When DFO’s monthly meetings were in-person, such face-to-face interaction was commonplace. Each evening program gathering opened with half an hour of “social time.” Since we began meeting via Zoom because of COVID-19 — but continued to do so after the pandemic subsided — some members have expressed dismay at losing that monthly opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones.

At our Volunteer Recognition gathering, I got to chat with people I hadn’t seen in a while and met some new folks, too. A congenial buzz of conversation filled the room as we sipped coffee and snacked before the program. Everyone seemed to enjoy the social time as much as I did.



A few days earlier, several of us had a similar experience that might model another way for DFO members to meet and greet. The club’s Awards Committee met over coffee with **Peter Stoltz**, one of this year’s Meadowlark Award winners for his behind-the-scenes DFO volunteer work. A previous commitment prevented Peter from joining us at the Volunteer Recognition gathering, so we brought the award to him.

Over coffee and pastries at Denver’s Wash Perk coffeehouse, the informal award presentation became a lively chat about birding, DFO, and other shared interests. What a great opportunity it was to catch up with one another around a table instead of via Zoom! Peter even arrived half an hour early to do some sidewalk birding around the Washington Park neighborhood.

By the time we wrapped up this impromptu coffee klatsch, a consensus had brewed. “Let’s do this again!” we agreed. It was fun, and we realized how much we missed the social mix of in-person meetings.

DFO is searching for a solution to that dilemma: an affordable place to hold monthly program meetings together but still host them in real time via Zoom for those who can’t attend in person. That search continues.

In the meantime, I’m proposing a new, official but casual DFO function: **Coffeehouse Chats**. Let our mascot be the Yellow-breasted Chat, whose chatty array of seasonal [chirrs, rattles and squawks](#) catches birders’ ears along the Front Range.

On the **third Wednesday of each month**, we will meet at a different coffeeshop with a designated DFO host. All who attend are expected to patronize our meeting place, buying a drink or treat. We’ll choose locations close to Denver metro area parks and green spaces so attendees can go birding on their own before or after our meetup.

Continued on page 6

The point here is to meet and reconnect with DFO friends old and new. Bring something to talk about — a birding topic, a DFO question, something else timely and on your mind, bird-related or not — and spark a fun conversation.

We have set two dates for the end of 2024 and the start of 2025:

Wednesday, Dec. 18, 8:30 a.m.

Wash Perk

853 E. Ohio Ave., Denver 80209

RSVP to host **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com

Wednesday, Jan. 15, 8:30 a.m.

St. Mark's Coffee House

2019 E 17th Ave., Denver 80206

RSVP to host **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. (*Weather-permitting, join Pat in nearby Denver City Park an hour beforehand or afterwards for a gander at geese and waterfowl on the park's lakes*)

I invite you to attend one or both of these and consider hosting a future Coffeehouse Chat. There's certainly no shortage of friendly local coffeeshops in Denver and surrounding communities. So, who's up for hosting in February? Let's chat. Drop me a line by Jan. 1 and we'll set it up.

In the meantime, happy holiday birding, everyone!

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



Cackling Geese in Denver City Park



As DFO turns 90, this newsletter will turn a new page to “journal”

Patrick O'Driscoll

Welcome to the final issue of *The Lark Bunting* as Denver Field Ornithologists' monthly newsletter. But we'll be right back in January as . . . *The Lark Bunting*, DFO's quarterly journal.

As mentioned in a couple of previous letters from the editor like this, our club is about to split its regular online publication in two. Starting in January, we will deliver you month-to-month news, announcements and updates — the need-to-knows of DFO life — via a new e-newsletter. At the same time, *The Lark Bunting* will step back and re-focus on the nice-to-haves — timeless birding features and accounts, essays, member profiles, photo galleries of the birds we love, and more — but on a less labor-intensive publishing schedule. In 2025 and thereafter, issues of *The Lark Bunting* journal will publish on the DFO website in January, April, July and October.

The Lark Bunting's magazine look and feel won't change, nor will its most thought-provoking features. From accounts (and snapshots) of memorable field trips and the lives of memorable DFO friends to articles and commentary on science, history and conservation, we pledge more “good reads” beyond the day-to-day and “now this” details.

That's because DFO will continue to share anything urgent, time-sensitive or coming-right-up in a new email newsletter that we're calling *DFO On the Wing*. Not unlike the birds we love, it will be on-the-fly, of the moment, and coming in for a landing — in your inbox. Whatever's happening in or around the club, *DFO On the Wing* will deliver: from upcoming program previews and club events to seasonal appeals, new field trips, new faces, new places, and more.

Editing this new monthly will be **Mike Fernandez**, chair of DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee and creator of DFO Digest, the monthly email that for the past two years has served as a club tipsheet in between issues of *The Lark Bunting*. In fact, Mike's recent experimentation with his mid-month update looks a lot like what our new e-newsletter will be. *DFO On the Wing* won't just replace the digest. It will reimagine and enhance it as your quick monthly must-read on all things DFO.

It's no coincidence that all this is taking place as our club prepares to mark its most significant birthday since it was founded as the Colorado Bird Club in 1935 and renamed Denver Field Ornithologists sixty years ago in 1964. Ninety years a club! In 2025, we'll celebrate in the digital pages of both DFO publications. Look for an affectionate and informative new four-part history of the club in our birthday year's quarterly issues of *The Lark Bunting*. And look for *DFO On the Wing* to keep abreast of events to commemorate this milestone for Colorado's oldest bird-related organization, from programs to field trips and more.

Finally, please accept our personal invitation to share with us whatever matters to you about birding and DFO. Got a story idea, or a gripe or a thumbs up? Tell Mike and me about it. Want to write something for the monthly or the quarterly yourself? Let us know. Almost no birding-related topic is off the table. *Operators are standing by!* A field trip memory, your view on a hot birding topic, your best bird photos from backyard to field trip to out-of-state and beyond? SHARE them all with me at patodrisk@gmail.com and with Mike at comm@dfobirds.org.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations.

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: CHRISTMAS COUNT ID PREP!

The December installment of DFO's "BIRD BOMBS" species identification Zoom mini-webinars will review common Colorado bird ID challenges in preparation for the month's many Christmas Bird Counts across the state. "BIRD BOMBS: CBC Explosion!" is scheduled for **Thursday, Dec. 12, 7 p.m. MST**.

If you missed the most recent "BIRD BOMBS: Colorado ID Masters," the Zoom video will be available with all the other past programs on the [Denver Field Ornithologists YouTube channel](#). The series videos also are available in the [BIRD BOMBS video library](#) on the DFO website.

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

EBIRD TAXONOMY UPDATE INCLUDES HERRING GULL X 4

As if gulls weren't already devilishly difficult to tell apart, the latest tweaks in the ranks of global bird taxonomy include splitting Herring Gull into four different flavors. That change leads eBird's [October announcement](#) that it has finished updating many millions of checklist records to reflect species splits, lumps and other revisions to bird species worldwide in 2024. For the record: eBird reports 3 newly described species, an increase of 11 species because of splits (and the loss of 16 through lumps), for a net rise in 128 species and a grand total of 11,145 bird species on the planet, in case you're thinking about a Global Big Year.

Our continent's default "local" will now be American Herring Gull (*Larus smithsonianus*). European (*Larus argentus*) and Mongolian (*Larus mongolicus*) will pertain to those

regions, and Vega (*Larus vegae*) breeds in Siberia. But gulls' general inclination to wander far and wide will make new identification a challenge, to say the least. (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology says the Herring Gull split alone resulted in revision of 7 million birding records, eBird's largest change ever.)

Other highlights: Barn Owl split into three species (*American Barn Owl* is the new name for ours), House Wren into seven (Northern House Wren is ours), and the three redpolls lump into one, now simply Redpoll. Finally, one esoteric but notable change caught our eye: The lookalike Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk are splitting apart taxonomically. Cooper's, American Goshawk and seven other global species are leaving the genus *Accipiter* for *Astur*, a dormant designation resurrected to accommodate the "long-anticipated breakup" of the overbroad *Accipiter* group. ("Astur" is Latin for "hawk.") Sharpie, BTW, will remain a true *Accipiter*.

For the complete list of changes, visit eBird's [2024 update](#) webpage.



HOW EBIRD REVIEW WORKS

Speaking of eBird, have you ever wondered how and why eBird reviewers accept some of your rare bird sightings but flag others with requests for more information? **Doug Hitchcock**, a veteran volunteer eBird reviewer in Maine, explains it all in his YouTube video, "[How eBird Review Works](#)." This info-packed, easy-viewing presentation flies by much faster than its 19 minutes and is worth watching, repeatedly. He explains the simple nuts-and-bolts mechanics of the review process, including filters that "know" to raise a flag if you report unusually large numbers or questionable locations of certain birds found in places and at times of the year that are dubious.

Continued on page 9

When reviewers like Hitchcock follow up via email, “I know how people can get really defensive when we’re just asking for a few more details . . . I can’t vouch for all of the reviewers out there, but we’re really just here to help you.” He admits one pet peeve: birders who dismiss a rare-bird flag by eBird for more details with an overused and annoying one-word response: “CONTINUING.” He notes: “You’d be amazed how many people report a sighting as ‘Continuing’ and later upload pictures of the wrong bird.”

Being an eBird reviewer “is a time-consuming and tedious process . . . and is largely thankless, and sometimes you deal with some really nasty people,” he adds. “Remember, we’re volunteers.”

To view more of Hitchcock’s eBird-related videos, visit his [YouTube channel](#). And a thank-you shoutout to **Diane Roberts** of the Denver Field Ornithologists Facebook Group page for first posting a link to this helpful video there in late October.



**HAPPY THANKSGIVING
– GO WILD!**

Sandra Hoyle



Nic Korte
Lee Gelatt Photography

WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Monday, Jan. 27, 2025
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

There's no missing the call to well-informed activism — especially where Mother Earth is concerned — in that familiar turn of phrase, “Think globally, act locally.” Longtime western Colorado wildlife conservationist **Nic Korte** suggests that North American birders try putting a Western Hemispheric twist to it: Think tropically, act locally.

Korte says he'll detail that in “*No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado*,” his DFO evening program on Monday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m. MST via Zoom webinar. Korte's presentation was originally scheduled for last August, but had to be postponed and now marks the first DFO program of the new year.

“Local actions here affect birds in the tropics,” Korte says, explaining his tropical focus. “Some of those birds spend part of their lives in Colorado. Avoiding palm oil in products you buy helps not just the birds whose year-round tropical habitat might be saved, but also birds that live part of the year here in North America.”

This is the time when birds familiar to us as spring migrants and summer nesters have departed for their neotropical fall and winter haunts in southern Mexico, Central and South America. Tanagers. Orioles. Grosbeaks. Buntings. Flycatchers. Warblers . . . not to mention every Swainson's Hawk on the planet.

Korte, a 40-year resident of Grand Junction, has been the conservation chair of Grand Valley Audubon Society for more than two decades and a board member for nearly three. He also leads the society's Western Screech-Owl observation project, with several hundred Grand Valley residents engaged in a community science effort with national status.

But Korte has also made more than 30 trips to the tropics. “I find the diversity of everything fascinating. There's so much to see, so many types of plants, butterflies, etc.” He even wrote a book, *Ten*

Jungle Days (Outskirts Press), that combines human and natural history, personal memoir and nature discovery travel in the Costa Rican rainforest. His encounters there include exotic amphibians, anteaters, climbing rats, spider monkeys and “the delightful siren call of extraordinary birds.”

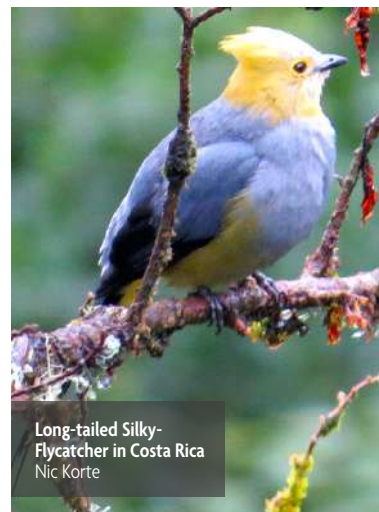
Korte says the aim of his DFO talk “is not to have people ‘know’ about the issues, but to inspire them to do something.” He thinks the fact that many of “our” birds spend more of their lives in the neotropics gives us a greater stake in their welfare there.

Growing up in the farmlands of rural southern Illinois, “I was always interested in birds,” Korte says, “but if you weren't harvesting something, whatever you were doing was considered wasteful. The only way to express outdoor interest then was hunting and fishing.”

Indoors, the family's 1956 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia* revealed Nic's true interest. “The ‘B’ volume,” he says, “had several very worn pages — the pages on birds. I wore them out looking at them.”

He grew up to become a geochemist. But after graduate school, he worked at the University of Arizona in Tucson, “where I actually encountered birders” for the first time — and found a life's hobby.

In 2015, Korte received Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' Richard G. Levad Award for “distinguished service to the ornithological community.” In 2019, National Audubon awarded him its William Dutcher Award for “leadership in the birding community of Western Colorado.” Follow his blog at [Birds and More – Birding and Conservation in Western Colorado](#).



Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in Costa Rica
Nic Korte



WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens

Nathan Pieplow
Monday, Feb. 24, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Colorado bird authority **Nathan Pieplow**, a frequent DFO speaker in past years, returns in 2025 to challenge and enlighten us on an unexpected topic for a man best known for his command of birdsong and bird sounds:

How do we tell Colorado's two raven species, Chihuahuan and Common, apart from each other? And why might we be doing a lousy job of it with some of the photographs we post to eBird?

Pieplow's presentation, "*Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens*" (**Monday, Feb. 24, 2025, 7 p.m. MST** via Zoom webinar), springs from reading a [recent article](#) by **David Sibley**, the renowned national birding artist and expert, in *North American Birds*, the journal of the American Birding Association. Pieplow says Sibley proposed that at least half, and maybe up to 90%, of photos submitted to eBird from Colorado as Chihuahuan Ravens might actually be Common Ravens. "If this is true," Pieplow adds, "then the conventional wisdom on raven status, distribution, and identification needs some serious revision."

Pieplow will review what we know about ravens and how we know it, including Sibley's recent innovations in identification criteria and an in-depth listen to raven voices. Along the way, he'll talk about raven intelligence and what that means for their vocal communication. And he'll pose this question: "If we've been getting the ravens so wrong, what other accepted species records might need revisiting?"

He will also discuss how birding authorities validate unusual sightings in Colorado, including reports of Chihuahuan Ravens beyond the southeastern quarter of our state that is the northernmost part of the species' range.

A decade ago, Pieplow wrote about the role of voice in telling Chihuahuan and Common ravens apart in Colorado on [Earbirding](#), a bird-sounds blog he co-authored through the 2010s. Pieplow's most recent DFO appearance was in August 2022, when he entertained us with "The Best Bird Songs You've Never Heard" — his take on the unexpected and accomplished singing and sounds of unlikely species, from cormorants and vultures to House Sparrows.

Pieplow has been a determined student of bird sounds for more than two decades. He wrote the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* (with separate volumes for western and eastern North America), and he is former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail](#) website.

A native of South Dakota, Pieplow grew up fascinated by birds. Now based in Boulder, he is an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Chihuahuan Raven, left, and Common Raven, side by side in *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's October program

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend our most recent program live via Zoom, click the "WATCH ONLINE" link below to view the recording on [DFO's YouTube channel](#).



Screen grab from Matthew Young's presentation

OCTOBER 28

Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new Stokes Guide to Finches Matthew A. Young [Finch Research Network](#)

In this recording of DFO's Oct. 28 evening program, **Matthew A. Young** leads viewers through his 30-year love affair with finches. Not to be missed — and just four minutes into his presentation — is a mesmerizing two-minute video Young created for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It shows White-winged Crossbills deftly prying seeds (up to 3,000 a day) from spruce cones, sometimes even breaking off the cylindrical cones to nibble at another perch, turning them as if eating corn-on-the-cob.

Besides crossbills (including Cassia Crossbills, thought isolated only to southern Idaho until Colorado birders found them here three years ago), Young details the work of his [Finch Research Network](#), updates the status of the continent's finch species (Hawaii's, too) and explores the alarming drop in Evening Grosbeak numbers, down 92% since 1970.

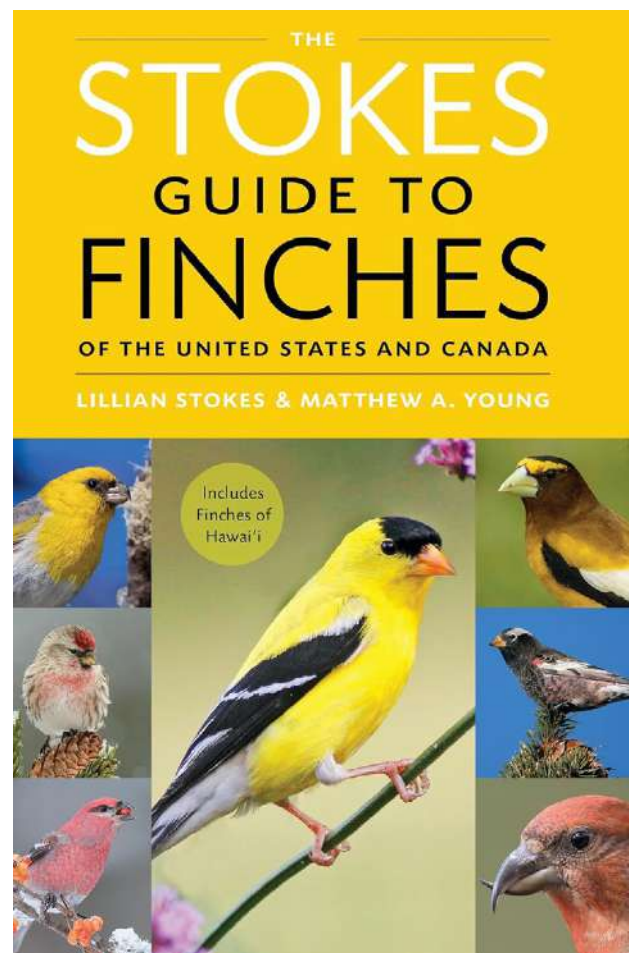
Later in his 78-minute presentation, he guides viewers through the comprehensive new *Stokes Guide to Finches of the United States and Canada* (Little, Brown, 352 pages, paperback, \$21.99), which he co-authored.

WATCH ONLINE



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website's [Past Programs page](#).



DFO veteran Ira Sanders heads list of volunteer honorees



Ira Sanders receiving Ptarmigan Award
from DFO President Sharon Tinianow
Patrick O'Driscoll



Tammy and Ira Sanders
Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll

A longtime DFO member known for his sharp birding eye and dry wit is the 30th recipient of Denver Field Ornithologists' highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award. **Ira Sanders** of Golden was recognized at DFO's Volunteer Recognition Event on Oct. 19 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

For the second year, DFO also presented its new honors for innovation and leadership (Peregrine Award) and behind-the-scenes volunteer contributions (Meadowlark Award). In addition, three organizers of DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch spring raptor count received special recognition, and every DFO volunteer in attendance received a DFO logo pin as a token of appreciation. The gathering opened with social time over midmorning beverages and snacks, and ended with a presentation of live birds and other wildlife by Colorado's own Nature's Educators conservation program.

Across more than three decades, Sanders has generously shared with DFO his board service, field trip leadership, legal expertise, and welcoming access to his birdy yard in the foothills of Golden. A trip leader for more than 20 years, Ira joined DFO in 1991 and will mark his 34th year in the club in 2025. Over the years he also has contributed to DFO's newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*. In 2009, he wrote a popular month-by-month series, "What Birds to Look for and Where to Look for Them," which he updated and repeated in the newsletter a decade later.

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** presented Sanders a framed painting of a White-tailed Ptarmigan by DFO member **Joe Chen**. The

Continued on page 14

award inscription reads: *"For exceptional field trip leadership, steadfast board service, generosity with your legal expertise, and a delightful sense of humor that helped sustain DFO through the years."* The Ptarmigan Award recognizes extraordinary devotion of time and energy to the club, often over a lifetime.

Sanders expressed his thanks and acknowledged that his wife, **Tammy** (in the audience recording video of the moment), was there with him for nearly every DFO field trip over the years.

The Peregrine Award was presented posthumously to **John C. Breitsch**, a gifted birder, DFO field trip leader, and promoter of under-birded hotspots across metro Denver. Four days before his Aug. 12 death of cancer, DFO friends informed John of the honor and read to him the wording later etched on the awards plaque: *"For smart innovation, meticulous planning and selfless leadership of exceptional DFO field trips near and far, to the delight of all who birded with you."*

Two volunteers received the Meadowlark Award for years of unsung heroics:

Jim Esten, DFO web and Zoom administrator and photo editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, was honored "for sharing your photography, running club webinars on Zoom, and ensuring the integrity of our website, enabling DFO to communicate effectively with Colorado's birding community."

Peter Stoltz, past DFO secretary, was recognized for vital technology contributions, including "introducing DFO to Zoom technology." His award certificate noted how "you mastered webinar programming, holding our club together remotely during COVID-19 and beyond."

In addition, three drivers of DFO's success running Colorado's only Hawk Watch raptor count were applauded for their efforts. Hawk Watch Committee chair **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo** presented custom-crafted American Kestrel lapel pins to:



Continued on page 15

Former DFO president **Dave Hill**, an accomplished bird-of-prey watcher who saved the raptor count from being abandoned. After previous Hawk Watch operators could no longer continue, he stepped in for DFO in 2020. Hill formed and chaired DFO's first Hawk Watch Committee, recruited volunteer watchers, and continues to teach the raptor ID webinar and site orientation each spring

Janet Peters and **Carol Cwiklinski**, who expanded Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch to involve paid experts to lead the daily counts in the field. Peters also served as committee chair and volunteer coordinator, and Cwiklinski supervised Hawk Watch's paid counting staff.

Tinianow thanked the event's planning committee, led by DFO volunteer coordinator **Phil Waltz** and including DFO Board members **Cyndy Johnson**, **Mary Geder**, **Susan Blansett** and **Patrick O'Driscoll**. She ended the presentations by recognizing field trip leaders also in the room. "It would not be DFO," Tinianow noted, "without field trips."



Top: Hawk Watch volunteers singled out for special thanks at Volunteer Recognition Event (Patrick O'Driscoll). Bottom left: Stylized American Kestrel pin awarded to Hawk Watch leaders. Bottom right: DFO logo lapel pin given to club's volunteers

Ptarmigan Award laureates list

DFO's highest honor was created in 1988 to recognize Ruth Wheeler, then the last living charter member of the Colorado Bird Club, founded in 1935 and renamed Denver Field Ornithologists in 1964. Winners of the award include:

2024	Ira Sanders
2023	Ann Johnson
2018	Karen von Saltza Kayleen Niyo
2017	Mary Cay Burger
2016	Edmund J. Holub, Jr.
2015	Chuck Hundertmark
2014	Jackie King
2013	Joe Roller
2012	Joey Kellner
2009	Ann Bonnell
2007	Tina Jones
2005	Dick Schottler
2004	Norm Erthal
2002	Karleen Schofield
2001	Warren Finch Glenn Hageman
1997	Lynn Willcockson
1996	Duane Nelson Catherine A. "Birdie" Hurlbutt
1995	Patty Echelmeyer Bob Spencer
1994	Robert Andrews Bob Righter
1990	Hugh and Urling Kingery
1989	Jack Reddall Harold Holt
1988	Ruth Wheeler Thompson Marsh

Further details about each recipient are on the DFO website's [Ptarmigan Awards page](#).



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

A new wrinkle for new field trippers: meet DFO's first Rookie of the Year

David Suddjian

Hundreds of Colorado birders sign up for Denver Field Ornithologists trips every year. All of them, from newbies to old hands, enhance our field outings with fresh birding perspectives, gifts and needs. Fortunately for DFO, many of them return again for more.

Whether they come back a few times or a lot (I like to call that second group our “frequent fliers”), repeat participants make DFO’s field trip program better. It’s not just their numbers — it’s their enthusiasm. I especially enjoy welcoming newcomers eager to immerse themselves in our shared passion for birds.

To honor that spirit, this year we’re naming the field trip program’s first “Rookie of the Year” — an individual new to DFO field trips (whether new to birding or not) whose participation on multiple outings has enriched everyone’s experience.

Introducing the 2024 DFO Rookie of the Year: **Ryan Corda** of Denver!

Ryan began birding just last winter and signed up for his first DFO field trip in March. By late November, he’d become DFO’s most frequent flier of 2024, joining FORTY-THREE field trips! Ryan’s kind and friendly manner was evident from the start. So was his budding skill as a birder, frequently spotting new birds for the group. His thoughtful questions of experienced birders on the trail help everyone learn. And on many of our day-long outings, Ryan volunteers to drive for the carpool, a generosity that helps make out-of-town trips possible for any and all.

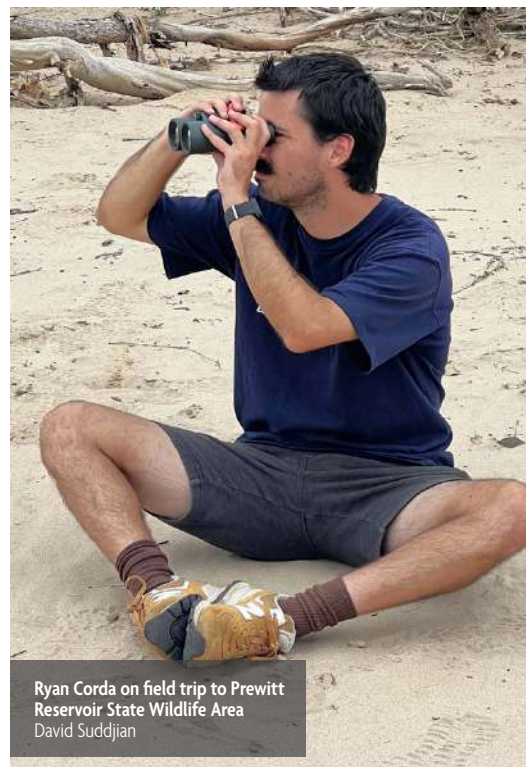
I invited Ryan to share with you his rookie-year experience in DFO:

Last December, I began to pay a little attention to birds and submitted a couple of incidental eBird checklists from my backyard. My interest turned to real appreciation in January, when I started birding properly. In February, I went on a couple of walks with other birding organizations. But I didn’t really find my place until, just by happenstance, I came across DFO’s website. All those field trips!

*My first was a March 9 outing led by **Charlie Chase** along the South Platte River near Denver’s water treatment plant. That super-interesting waterfowl study was also a neat introduction to the unorthodox places where you can find birds. Shortly thereafter, I joined a couple of trips led by **David Suddjian** to a few parks in Littleton (my first encounters with Merlin and Virginia Rail) and to the town of Louviers in Douglas County (a crazy number of Blue Jays).*



Ryan Corda on field trip
at Beaver Ranch Park
David Suddjian



Ryan Corda on field trip to Prewitt
Reservoir State Wildlife Area
David Suddjian

Continued on page 17



DFO Rookie of the Year field tripper Ryan Corda, third from left, on trip to Ken Caryl Ranch
David Suddjian

Just three trips and I was totally hooked! Since then, I've tried to catch every field trip I can, from Larimer County to Las Animas, from the Front Range to the eastern Plains. Some of these outings went so far afield that I saw parts of Colorado I'd never have visited otherwise. And watching David's "BIRD BOMBS" bird ID presentations was totally invaluable preparation for many of my field trips.

Here are a few more highlights of my first field-tripping year with DFO:

- *A Long-billed Curlew in Lincoln County, seen unexpectedly as we looked for Mountain Plovers*
- *Flushing a female Northern Bobwhite by accident as we tracked her with telemetry at Tamarack Ranch SWA*
- *The calls of Common Poorwills and the fun and frustration of trying to ID Empidonax flycatchers*
- *Learning the history of Colorado's Ludlow and Sand Creek massacres on Birds Plus+ field trips (I can't wait for more)*
- *A pair of Juniper Titmice that complicated our eBird checklists by hopping over the Las Animas-Huerfano county line*
- *Being surrounded by Red-headed Woodpeckers near Prewitt Reservoir*
- *Hearing the song of a Hermit Thrush for the first time*

My favorite part of all was the people: super-welcoming and helpful participants, and passionate and informative trip leaders who were also great teachers. I can't say thank you enough.

— Ryan Corda

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair since 2021, has led more than 540 club outings. He came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. He organized the club's 2018 "Big Year" and created the "BIRD BOMBS" mini-webinar series on bird ID. David received DFO's inaugural Peregrine Award for innovation in 2023.

♪ *Christmas is coming,* ♪ *the geese are getting fat . . .* Help count them to celebrate that!

Joey Kellner

The 70th Denver Christmas Bird Count, part of the continent-wide annual tally sponsored by National Audubon, is set for **Saturday, Dec. 14**. All are encouraged to participate, from beginning birders to experts and everyone in between. And it's free!

"Fees? None! So, no excuses," says count leader and compiler **Joey Kellner**, a longtime DFO member and field trip leader. "Come have a great time and help us count birds!"

The Denver CBC, which is conducted inside a 15-mile diameter circle over most of southwest metro Denver, is one of several along the Front Range. It is centered roughly between Ken Caryl and Columbine and bounded by Green Mountain on the north, Littleton east, Douglas County above Louviers on the south and Jefferson County foothills communities west (*see map*). It also includes Chatfield State Park and several major reservoirs. Each of the 24 count zones has an area leader (*see numbered list*). Teams assigned to each will canvass for species and numbers.

Another Denver count — *Urban Denver*, centered east of downtown and containing a bit of Aurora — takes place on New Year's Day 2025. That count is near the end of the roughly three-week window in which thousands of Audubon CBCs occur across the continent.

Depending on area, the suburban Denver count may last half a day or until day's end. But participants are free to come for however long they like. Afterwards, all participants are invited to attend the annual compilation meeting to warm up, chat with other birders, and see how the count went.

This year's post-count meetup is set for approximately 5 p.m. MST in the multipurpose room of Chatfield State Park headquarters, on the south-central side of Chatfield Reservoir near the park's Heronry Overlook. Access is via the park entrance off South Wadsworth Boulevard. A reminder that at state parks, a **vehicle entry pass is required**, and carpooling is encouraged.

To sign up for a count that interests you, see the map of numbered count areas. Then go to the list of count leaders and area names, find the one that corresponds to the numbered area you want to join, and call or email the leader. If you want Kellner to assign you to a less in-demand area that needs additional observers, contact him at swdenverbirding@gmail.com or 303-978-1748. Any other questions? Contact Kellner for answers, too.

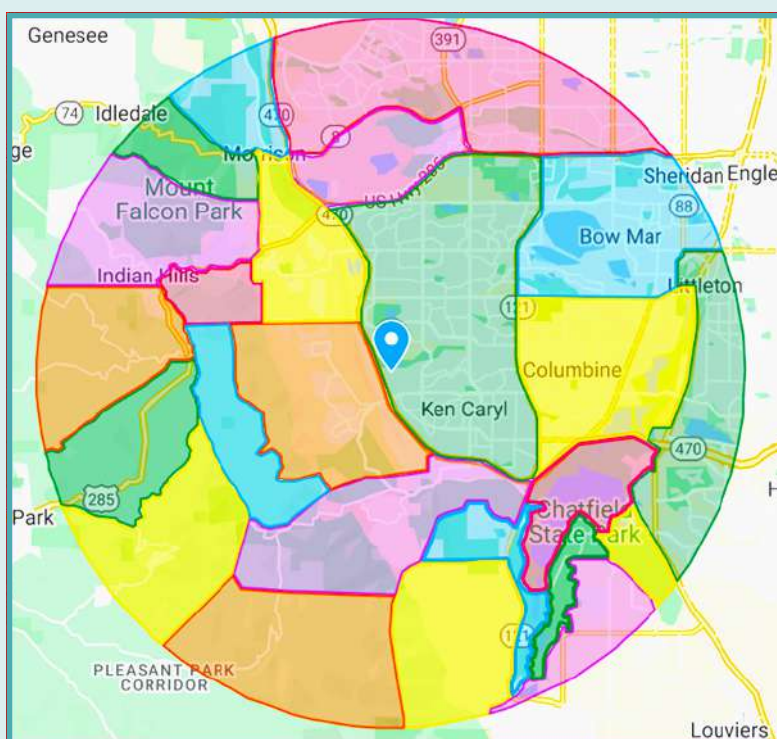
The count also includes stationary participants who compile species and numbers visiting their bird feeders at home within the count circle. To join this feeder count, contact feeder coordinator **Bob Shade** at wrshade3@gmail.com. Feeder watchers will be asked to send Bob their lists of species and numbers of each species as soon as possible after "count day."



Continued on page 19

AREA	NUMBER AND LOCATION	AREA LEADER	CONTACT INFO
1.	Red Rocks Park	Gregg Goodrich	303-655-9135
2.	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573
2A.	Bear Creek Lake Park	Cyndy Johnson	303-378-1335
3.	Bow Mar/Marston	Mary Geder	303-981-8823 or mfg5000@live.com
4A.	Lower South Platte – East	Cole Sage	colesage03@gmail.com
4B.	Lower South Platte – West	Steve Larson	woodcreeper29@comcast.net
5.	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833
6.	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596
7A.	Middle South Platte – West	Sue Summers	253-678-3721 or summerssue@hotmail.com
7B.	Middle South Platte - East	Leader Needed	
8.	Chatfield Reservoir	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748
9.	Upper South Platte **	Jill Holden	720-288-4018
10.	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Barbra Sobhani	barbra Maher@comcast.net
11.	Upper Deer Creek	Wes Donnell	720-648-7305 or wdonnell7584@gmail.com
12.	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534
13.	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	amyjaned21@hotmail.com
14.	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321
15.	Indian Hills	Ryan Dibala	ryan@gobirdingman.com
16.	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	lauramsteadman@gmail.com
17.	Ken Caryl Ranch	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com
18.	Garrison Gate	Leader needed	
19.	Morrison / Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508
20.	Willow Creek	Dale Pate	575-706-4584
21.	Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645

** To participate in area 9 / Upper South Platte, you must contact the area leader no later than **Monday, Nov. 25**



SUPPORTING DFO

Last call: Annual membership renewal is also a great time to donate to DFO

How's that end-of-year checklist looking? No, not your eBird checklist — rather, that to-do list of yours before 2024 becomes last year's news. If it still includes renewing your DFO membership, push it to the top and get to it. Current memberships expire on **Dec. 31, 2024**. Renewing now is as easy as a couple of clicks on the membership [renewal page](#) of the DFO website.

While you're at it, how about making a donation or two to DFO, Colorado's oldest birding organization. Did you know our club turns 90 in 2025? How about an early birthday gift to our citizen science project, the DFO Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch raptor count? Or a contribution to DFO's Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund for worthy outside projects to benefit knowledge, science and conservation of Colorado birds and their habitat?

Last month's issue included a more detailed appeal for the grants fund. This month, we're also featuring Hawk Watch and Colorado Gives Day, the statewide charitable giving day (**Tuesday, Dec. 10**) that includes DFO for the second year.

Read on for more details on each — and give 'til it helps!

SUPPORTING DFO

Colorado Gives: DFO's on list again for Dec. 10 donate-aganza

Mike Fernandez

In 2023, Denver Field Ornithologists joined [Colorado Gives Day](#), the nonprofit fundraising effort that provides grassroots donors an online directory of more than 1,600 charitable, nonprofit organizations across the state. With this year's day of donations set for **Tuesday, Dec. 10**, consider using it to make an extra donation to DFO. While you're at it, share DFO's direct Colorado Gives link (below) with friends and family to increase the response, won't you?

Since 2010, Colorado Gives has helped raise more than \$415 million for community organizations of every kind. Its one-stop-shopping convenience online allows donors to contribute easily and securely to all their favorite Colorado causes.

This 24-hour focused appeal between Thanksgiving and the Christmas-Hannukah-Kwanzaa holidays is coming up fast, but early giving is already underway at [DFO's page](#) on the Colorado Gives website.

Although DFO's finances are in good shape, we joined Colorado Gives last year to boost income so we can enhance our club offerings, including the Hawk Watch raptor-counting project each spring on Dinosaur Ridge. And DFO's first-year results on Colorado Gives Day 2023 exceeded our expectations: \$2,950 in donations.

Contributing via Colorado Cares is easy and convenient. Visit the [Giving Methods](#) page on the [Colorado Gives](#) website to donate using any of nine different ways to make one-time or recurring payments. While you're on DFO's Colorado Gives page, consider also clicking the link to "[Share This Organization](#)" by email or on social media (Facebook, X/Twitter) with family and friends. It brings up a draft email or Facebook or X/Twitter posts with content about use. You can also simply share the [DFO page link](#) in your email to friends.

*A DFO member since 2014, **Mike Fernandez** edits the mid-month DFO Digest and is Communications & Outreach Committee chair. He is a retired Interior Department communications manager.*



Hawk Watchers scanning for raptors from Dinosaur Ridge
Janet Peters



Bald Eagle
John C. Breitsch



Ferruginous Hawk
John C. Breitsch

SUPPORTING DFO

Donate NOW to Hawk Watch, and your gift doubles with secret donor's match

Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

If you're renewing your membership with Denver Field Ornithologists, thank you! While you're at it, please consider making an additional year-end, tax-deductible donation to the DFO Hawk Watch Fund on the matching-grant page of the Colorado Gives website.

This year, DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch program has a chance to *double* all donations through **Dec. 31**. An anonymous family foundation will match every donation to Hawk Watch, dollar-for-dollar, between now and year's end at the link above.

Since DFO took over management of the Dinosaur Ridge raptor count in 2020, the program has grown into a vibrant volunteer community science project. Your donation goes directly to compensate field biologists who serve as chief hawk counters and observers. They in turn share the skills they hone on raptor ID with DFO's corps of volunteers who help with daily counts on the ridge each spring. Some of the funds also go to Hawk Watch educational programming to increase awareness about raptor migration and conservation.

Some off-season personnel notes:

- Lead counter and project lead **Emma Riley** will return for the 2025 season. She spent time in 2024 as an avian technician conducting bird mortality surveys on a wind farm
- **Dustin Kohler**, lead counter in 2024, went on to become an avian field tech in Wyoming for Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
- 2024 weekend observer **Audrey Anderson** is now assistant hawk counter and Monarch Butterfly biologist at Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory in Kiptopeke

An upcoming calendar note: Registration for the Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch training opens **Friday, Dec 20** at the Hawk Watch link on the [DFO website](#).

DONATE TO HAWK WATCH HERE!

Natalie Uschner-Arroyo is interim chair of DFO's Hawk Watch Committee



SUPPORTING DFO

'Tis the season . . . for tax-free giving

Roger Koester

When we give holiday presents to loved ones, they enjoy the gifts and we get positive feelings, too. It's the same with gifts to favorite causes, charities and even a certain nonprofit birding organization we're all familiar with. At this giving time of the year, there's also the extra benefit of a year-end tax break for such charitable giving.

For those of us age 73 or older who are required by law to take a minimum distribution each year from our retirement savings, there's an even better reason to give. When we make those mandatory withdrawals from our Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA), we pay income tax on that money.

But if we donate some or all the money in those "required minimum distributions" (RMD) from our IRAs directly to a qualified nonprofit, we pay no income tax on them. And yes, Denver Field Ornithologists is a qualified nonprofit. (By the way: People in this instance can make these direct donations any time during the year, whenever they take an RMD.)

Pardon the alphabet salad, but here's one more abbreviation: QCD, or "qualified charitable distribution." That's what this kind of donation is. So if you are now required because of age to take an RMD this year (tax year 2024), make some or all of it a QCD to a nonprofit charity, it's tax-free. You get to exempt that donated amount from your taxable income.

If this sounds complicated (it is not), get this: You don't even have to itemize your taxes to do this! Make a QCD with some or all of that RMD from your IRA, and that dollar-for-dollar direct reduction of your taxable income is A-OK . . . for your taxes and for DFO (or any other qualified nonprofit).

One important caveat to remember: Whatever amount you choose to contribute to charity as a QCD *must* be donated from your IRA *directly* to a qualified nonprofit. Do NOT withdraw the money first and then donate it to DFO, because that does NOT qualify for the tax exemption. Donations must be direct from your IRA to the nonprofit recipient.

A final note: Additional restrictions may apply for some individuals. To learn more about whether and how it might apply to you or not, contact your tax adviser or retirement provider first, *before* you donate.

Roger Koester, a DFO member since 2018, is Finance Committee chair and a member of the DFO Board. Before retiring, he worked in student financial aid for several universities and was active in national, state, and regional professional associations.

Welcome to new DFO members

Isabelle Busch of Fort Collins; Peter, James, Kelly, Will and Lucy Dinneen, Denver; Troy and Edward Donnan, Denver; Michael Eagen and Elaine Cooksey, Denver; Tom Kajiwaru, Brighton; Spencer and Brandy Margeson, Aurora; Jenine and Sandy Mathia, Denver; Steve Matthews, Golden; Sharon Tanaka, Littleton

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Renee and Dan Brachear; Nicole Callaway; Kevin Corwin; Doris Cruze; Roy Hohn; Andrew Michelle Husko; Roger Koester; Kathanne Lynch; Jenine and Sandy Mathias; Joyce Michael; Linda Purcell and Billy A. Harris Jr.; Niña Routh; Betsy Rumely; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Nancy and Bob Stocker; Mary Zick

Friends of DFO

Nicole Callaway; Kevin Corwin; Doris Cruze; Roy Hohn; Laura Hollenbaugh; Roger Koester; Barry and Donna Levene; Winston Liu; Jenine and Sandy Mathias; Joyce Michael; Victoria Miles; Linda Purcell and Billy A Harris Jr.; Mary Beth Searles; Lynn Slaga; Kenneth Arroyo and Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Mary Ann Bonnell; Kevin Corwin; Doris Cruze; Roy Hohn; Darcy Juday; Kathanne Lynch; Jenine and Sandy Mathias; Jean McClenathen; Joyce Michael; Lori Morton



Downy Woodpecker
John C. Breitsch



Northern Shrike
John C. Breitsch



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

October DFO trips *In Focus*

Fall migration DFO field trips in October 2024 included 19 outings on which [birders reported 145 species](#). Participants on 15 of those trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 89-year-old club. If you’re on DFO outings in November and December, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the next issues of *The Lark Bunting*. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our January 2025 issue is **Tuesday, Dec. 31**. Thanks!

OCTOBER 1

Deer Creek White-throated Swift Watch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Michelle Trotter, Mary Ramsey, Shai Ronen,
Michelle Verostko, Bonnie Prado, Paula Rosson

Swifties of a different sort — birders watching as many as 250 White-throated Swifts return to their fall migration night roost in the sandstone wall of the Lyons hogback above Deer Creek — zero in during Oct. 1 evening outing
(David Suddjian)



OCTOBER 2-3

Birds + History, Southeastern Colorado (Lincoln, Crowley, Otero, Kiowa, Bent, Prowers, Cheyenne counties)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Linda Purcell

Participants

Ryan Corda, Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Kenneth Stuckey,
Betsy Goodwin, Virginia Gulakowski, Dawn Baudek-Smith,
Kris Saucke, Ian de la Rosa

Morning start at Box Springs Pond in Crowley County during Oct. 2-3 Birds + History excursion across 7 counties in SE Colorado. It included a history visit and birding at Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in Kiowa County
(Ryan Corda)

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OCTOBER 4

Ponderosa Preserve (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cynthia Pederson Cestkowski and Gary Witt

Participants

Elizabeth Fischer, Susan Blansett, Linda Cunico,
Ethan Cleveland, Sandy Mathias

Out in the grasslands Oct. 4 at Ponderosa Preserve in Aurora on
Cynthia Pedersen Cestkowski's first time leading a DFO field trip
(Gary Witt)



OCTOBER 4

Deer Creek White-throated Swift Watch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Chip Dawes,
Andrea Duran, Lisa Forte

Field trippers lean back for better view on encore Oct. 4 outing
to view about 100 White-throated Swifts arriving at their night
roost in a crack in the sandstone wall above Deer Creek
(David Suddjian)



OCTOBER 5

South Republican Wildlife Management Area and Pipit Hill (Kit Carson, Yuma, and Cheyenne, KS)

Leader

Gary Witt

Participants

Winston Liu, Anne Craig, Dave Prentice, Susan
Blansett, Betsy Goodwin, Archer Silverman, Peter
Burke, Helen Butts, Linda Purcell, Ian de la Rosa

Birders move through fields near Yuma County's Pipit Hill
on Oct. 5 field trip in search of the area's namesake species
(Linda Purcell)



Continued on page 26



OCTOBER 6
Beaver Ranch Park
(Jefferson)

Leaders

Gigi Zarzuela and David Suddjian

Participants

Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Martha Strickland,
Sarah Feigelson, Michelle Trotter, Nathan Crow,
Morgan Kahle, John Batt, Nadiyah Watts,
Becky Russell, Linda Klumpers

A trailside pause to scan for birds during Oct. 6
field trip to Beaver Ranch Park in Conifer
(David Suddjian)

OCTOBER 11
**Barr Lake State Park Bird
Banding Station**
(Adams)

Leader

Charlie Chase

Participants

Lisa Bardwell, Martha Strickland, Michelle Trotter, Cindy
Bouldin, Michelle Verostko, Joseph Margoshes, Sharon
Kelly, Adam Silver, Brittany and Chad Van Soest

DFO field trippers surround bird bander Meredith McBurney on
Oct. 11 trip to Barr Lake State Park banding station as she retrieves
a White-crowned Sparrow from a mist net
(Sharon Kelly)



OCTOBER 12
**South Republican WMA
and Pipit Hill**
(Yuma, and Cheyenne, KS)

Leader

Gary Witt

Participants

Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Debbie and Tom Behnfeld,
Timothy Condon, Cynthia Breidenbach, Julia Gwinn, Matthew
Fast, Luke Jaramillo, Judy McKeon, Laura Hollenbaugh

Oct. 12 field trippers to Pipit Hill in Yuma County
pose for group selfie by trip leader
(Gary Witt)



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OCTOBER 18
Rampart Range Road
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Kenneth Stuckey, Coreen Spellman,
Dave Prentice, Christopher Curwen, Kris Saucke, Thomas Forre

Field trippers surveying along Highway 67 in
Jefferson County's Rampart Range on Oct. 18 DFO outing
(Dave Prentice)

OCTOBER 19
Bluff Lake Nature Center
(Denver)

Leader
George Ho

Participants
Scott Levine, Nadiyah Watts, John Collins,
Kris Tita, Nicole Callaway, Lynn Sauer

First-time field trip leader George Ho, during his
group outing to Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver
(Nadiyah Watts)



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OCTOBER 20
**Fairmount Cemetery /
High Line Canal**
(Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Scott Hammel, Lisa Seiler, Kathy Kunc,
Jeanne Marie Dillon, Virginia Gulakowski,
Michelle Trotter, John Batt, Phil Waltz

Birders pursue Dark-eyed Juncos in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery Oct. 20 on field trip that included High Line Canal
(Jason B. Bidgood)

OCTOBER 20
**Chatfield State Park
in the afternoon**
(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Alice Tariot, John Batt, Victoria Miles,
Cassandra Stroud, Tedford Luck, Timothy Condon,
Jenny Germano, Jill Engel-Cox

DFO field trippers scan Chatfield Reservoir during
afternoon outing Oct. 20 at Chatfield State Park
(Ted Luck)



OCTOBER 24
Park County reservoirs
(Park)

Leaders
Joe Tuttle and David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Bonnie Prado,
Luke Jaramillo, Coreen Spellman, Debra
Strike

On his first DFO outing as a trip leader,
Joe Tuttle leads Oct. 24 field trippers on return trek
across dry lakebed after scanning numerous waterbirds
on Spinney Mountain Reservoir in Park County
(Ryan Corda)



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OCTOBER 27
**Robert A. Easton Regional
Park, Littleton**
(Jefferson)

Leader
Amanda Baker

Participants
David Suddjian, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Lisa
Seiler, John Batt, Shay Lyons, Jennifer
Schripsema, Linda Klumpers

Amanda Baker, center, starts her first trip as a DFO
leader Oct. 27 at Hine Lake in Robert A. Easton
Regional Park
(David Suddjian)



OCTOBER 27
**Prospect Park / Wheat Ridge
Greenbelt**
(Jefferson, Douglas)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Morgan Kahle, Marie Mager, Martha Strickland,
Cyndy Johnson, Kris Tita, Nicole Callaway,
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lynn Slaga, Julia Auckland

Oct. 27 field trippers scan Bass Lake flock of 30 Gadwall from
viewing blind during Gigi Zarzuela's monthly DFO outing to
Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Gigi Zarzuela)

CONSERVATION

Denver Parks & Rec moves to revive City Park cormorants' nesting colony

Patrick O'Driscoll

On Sept. 23, the first workday of autumn 2024, chainsaws roared in wooded parts of Denver City Park as crews trimmed hazard trees and cleared branches snapped by windstorms. Just another day in the maintenance of the city's largest park.

But away from that ruckus, hard-hatted workers in a small boat shoved off from the south shore of the park's Duck Lake on a different task. They paddled 50 yards to the large, brushy island that dominates the small lake. Once ashore, they unloaded their own chainsaws and went to work.

An ambitious effort is underway to revive Duck Lake, the site of an enduring urban wildlife attraction for birders and non-birders alike: hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants courting, breeding, nesting, hatching and fledging annual generations of young. But the lake's seasonal population of the big black birds has been declining since 2022. Most of the large cottonwoods that hold the nests are dead or dying: at least two fell in recent years, and just before Thanksgiving week, another suddenly crashed down. There's real concern now that the cormorants could abandon the island rookery unless habitat and nesting conditions improve.

This fall and into 2025, Denver Parks & Recreation is shoring up the island's remaining trees, planting new ones, and adding man-made nesting platforms attached to rough-hewn tree trunks the size of telephone poles. The hope is that these artificial "habitat poles" will augment natural nesting trees still standing and substitute for those that have fallen. The trees have suffered years of decline from soil-burning, root-killing bird poop, as well as previous cormorants' stripping of branches and leaves for nest material.

That day in September, the workmen cleared overgrown thickets of Tree of Heaven, a widespread, invasive and weedy species of sumac native to China. But they left standing the mostly branchless hulks of seven or eight cottonwoods that still support the nests of bleached sticks that the cormorants build and rebuild each season. Some of the standing island trees lean precariously.

In mid-November, workers returned to screw metal anchors into the ground around the remaining trees. Then they rigged bracing cables tightly between anchors and trees to arrest further leaning and stabilize them against wind and weather.



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It took 12 workers to hoist the finished nest platform post into place



Cottonwood and honey locust saplings await planting on Duck Lake island

CORMORANTS *cont from page 30*

The following week, workers dug and augered post holes deep enough to prop two of the artificial platform trunks upright. Then they filled the holes around them with quick-setting concrete. Attached to each trunk are three skeletal nesting platforms, protruding like short tree branches.

As the nesting towers were being planted, other workers planted real trees: three saplings each of Plains cottonwood and Honey Locust “to hopefully establish and grow quickly to provide nesting habitat to the cormorants in future years,” said **Ian Schillinger-Brokaw**, a Parks & Rec urban ecology planner who oversees the Duck Lake project. Also planted were smaller Rocky Mountain maples as native understory growth “to compete with the Tree of Heaven and provide some habitat to smaller nesting birds,” he added.

Artificial nesting posts have been used in colonies of large birds elsewhere for decades. Denver based its platforms on a 1940s design from Wisconsin. Lakewood took a similar tack last year to replace storm-damaged nesting trees on the island in Belmar Park’s Kountze Lake with artificial nesting platforms on recycled lodgepole pines.

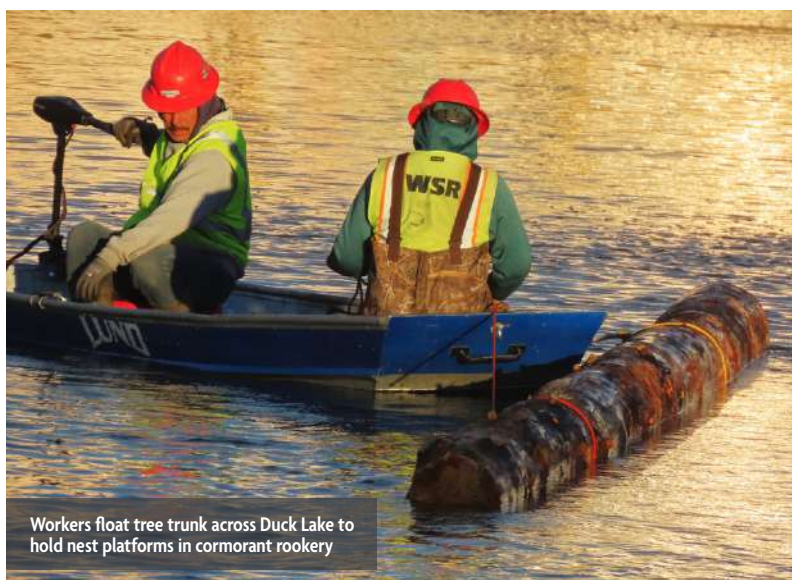
Technically, the rehabilitation of Duck Lake began years ago when the city installed 10 aerators to improve circulation of lake water, susceptible in summer to toxic, smelly and unsightly algae blooms. Three years ago, the city also replanted native shoreline grasses and other vegetation to improve habitat on the south edge of Duck Lake, where the passing public stands to view the cormorants, waterfowl and other wildlife.

Then last July, just before Independence Day, half a dozen floating platforms of marsh grasses, each roughly 4-5 feet square, suddenly appeared on the west side of the lake. Parks & Rec calls them “floating wetlands,” and they are an experiment to see if vegetation that filters water and provides beneficial habitat can help improve the lake.

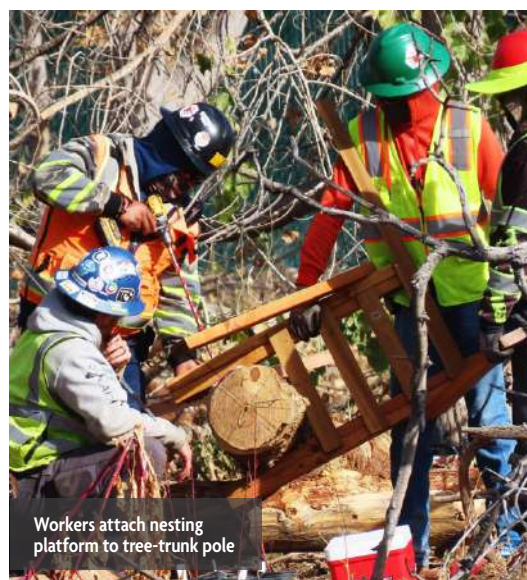
Each platform was planted with about 3 dozen plugs of marshland grasses, rushes and sedges. The aim is for their water-loving roots to grow down through the porous floating structure to soak up lake water nutrients and create habitat for fish, invertebrates and other water organisms. So far, the jury’s out. Waterfowl, mainly geese, have nibbled at the edges of the floating wetlands, preventing the grasses from growing to full height. Some waterfowl have also found the floating patches safe spots to nap in daytime and roost at night.

The history of the cormorants’ presence at Duck Lake is fuzzy. One early 20th-century account recorded that half a dozen fledgling cormorants were brought to Duck Lake from a rookery at Barr Lake. But there’s no evidence that the colony began then. City staff say the birds have nested on the Duck Lake island for at least 25 years, “but that is about as far back as we know for sure,” Schillinger-Brokaw said.

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Workers float tree trunk across Duck Lake to hold nest platforms in cormorant rookery



Workers attach nesting platform to tree-trunk pole



Two completed tree-trunk poles with nesting platforms attached are now in place on Duck Lake Island

CORMORANTS *cont from page 31*

The eBird database is too new (launched in 2002 but not immediately in widespread use) for more precise confirmation. But Denver City Park's earliest eBird record for Double-crested Cormorant was checklisted retroactively for two birds seen on Oct. 19, 1991. The first eBird historical record for Duck Lake specifically was on July 3, 1994. But that lister wrote only "X" for quantity, leaving no indication if he saw one cormorant or a colony. Still another eBirder checklisted later that he saw 75 cormorants on April 8, 2001, which suggests a nesting colony by then. By 2010, one eBird checklist noted 220 cormorants in the park. Over the next decade, numbers climbed as high as 700 adults, fledglings and nestlings in peak season. But since 2022, adult numbers have not exceeded the low 200s.

As cormorant guano continues to accumulate on the Duck Lake island, the newly planted trees face challenges to successful growth. "Soil conditions on the island are problematic and quite acidic," Schillinger-Brokaw said, but amending the soil isn't possible without an irrigation system. Therefore, "some mortality of the planted trees may occur . . . (but) we opted for tree species that are a little more tolerant — that hopefully will get used to the growing conditions on site and survive without constant additional inputs."

The project improvements get their first test In about three months. The cormorants typically start returning from southern winter retreats by mid- to late February.

Photos by Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Pilgrimage to Pipit Hill

Birders' pursuit of secretive prairie native is an almost spiritual trek across Colorado Plains



Like crime scene searchers, Oct. 12 DFO field trippers fan out across Pipit Hill grasslands
Laura Hollenbaugh

Patrick O'Driscoll

If there's a Holy Grail spot for birding on eastern Colorado's sweep of the Great Plains, it is *not* Pipit Hill.

By eBird's yardstick, birders have checklisted this remote, brown rise in Yuma County fewer than 300 times, all but one of them since 2010. Its unremarkable expanse of grazed pastureland — a patch of low grass, scattered cactus, boundary fences and a lone windmill in an isolated corner of [South Republican State Wildlife Area](#) north of Burlington — has yielded only 85 bird species total.

Yet every fall, small bands of faithful birders make the long drive out (three hours from Denver), hoping to commune with one bird — the shy, nondescript grassland species for which this desolate spot is named: [Sprague's Pipit](#). Although native to the Great Plains, it is a Colorado rarity. The bird is only seen along a narrow belt of Colorado-Kansas borderland that marks the west edge of its territory. It tends to stop through in late September and early October en route to wintering grounds in Texas and northern Mexico. Even the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birds of the World* notes that Sprague's Pipit "often goes undetected during its migration through the Great Plains."

(The species does have a certain historical pedigree, though. **John James Audubon** himself described and named it after his friend **Isaac Sprague**, who was first to encounter one of its nests in North Dakota more than 180 years ago.)

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Field tripper Anne Craig at Pipit Hill Oct. 5
Dave Prentice

PIPIT HILL *cont from page 34*

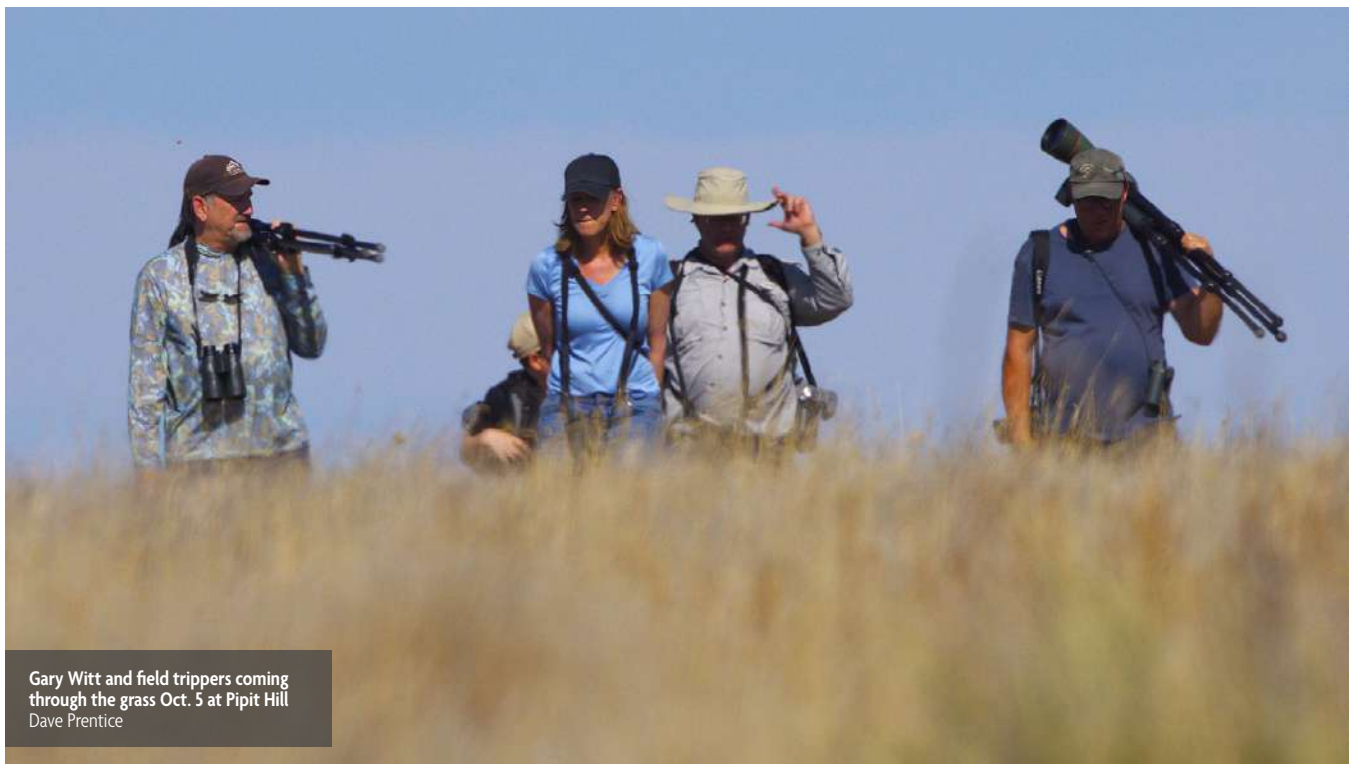
Although the birds are secretive and unassuming, their behavior is distinctive. Their nasal *squeet* call sounds like someone stepped on a dog's squeaky toy. Sprague's escape flight when flushed is a series of midair stairsteps — up and out, up and out — that may end with a sudden drop like a rock to hide again in the grass.

Thus forewarned, Sprague's seekers arrive at Pipit Hill rather like pilgrims reaching a distant shrine. Cautious if not quite reverent, they walk patiently through the grass, hoping to flush pipits for a few good looks and pictures.

"As the first bird takes off, I'm going, '*Look for the white on the tail! Look for the flight behavior! Listen for the squeaky toy!*'" says field trip leader **Gary Witt**, who led two successful DFO excursions to Pipit Hill in early October. (He had only planned one trip but the waiting list begged for another.) "Once you get a bird in the air, everybody tries to get eyes on it. If it comes down in our field, we can perhaps sneak up and see it."

A retired water resource consultant from Denver, Witt first got religion about Sprague's Pipit three years ago, drawn by a quest familiar to any serious Colorado birding "lister": to record at least 400 species in the state (out of the 520 ever observed thus far).

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Gary Witt and field trippers coming through the grass Oct. 5 at Pipit Hill
Dave Prentice

PIPIT HILL *cont from page 35*

"I wanted to break 400 right after I retired, when I was in the 390s," Witt says. (He's now at 419.) After first hearing of Sprague's and its uncommon occurrence in Colorado, "I kept asking people about it and they'd say well, it's kind of random to find it out on the eastern Plains, except for Pipit Hill." When he learned that DFO hadn't led many outings there, Witt asked Field Trips chair **David Suddjian**, "How come nobody does any trips to Pipit Hill?" Suddjian replied, "I don't know. Maybe you should do one."

In 2022, he and Suddjian and another birder went out for a look. "We crossed the field. We scared up a couple of birds," Witt recalls. "I thought, well, this is an interesting thing." He soon began leading trips there, because birding Pipit Hill solo is a real challenge: "You could walk around a pipit by yourself and never flush it, never see it."

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Sprague's Pipit calling from grassy lair
Tom Behnfield



Peter Burke presents Witt with Pipit Hill
souvenir of successful trip - a dried cow chip
Dave Prentice



Sprague's Pipit nearly invisible in the grass
Peter Burke

PIPIT HILL *cont from page 36*

Witt's trips employ what he calls "the FBI murder line." Like a crime-scene investigator searching for evidence, he spaces participants side by side, yards apart, for a careful, coordinated walk through the grass. They sweep east to west, then pivot north along the fence that marks Pipit Hill's west boundary.

"You try to cover as much ground as you can. Usually within a quarter-mile, we flush something," Witt says. Then it's a matter of a careful approach for better looks and pictures. With luck, birders will glimpse "the big dark eye," he adds, and the hint of an eye ring.

Once a Sprague's is recorded, it's time to celebrate with a "life bird" dance. "They're thrilled. They're all slapping five. 'We got it! We got it!'" he says of the field trippers' scene. "It makes for a great DFO trip. I'm excited when 80 to 90 percent of the group has not seen the bird before."

Witt aims to make the Sprague's Pipit pilgrimage "something that I can do repeatedly — the 'trip Gary does every fall.'" Mark your calendars now, pipit pilgrims!



Witt leads first-time spotters of Sprague's Pipit in celebratory Life Bird Dance
Robert Tonge

*Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY HOLIDAYS BIRDING!*



Sprague's Pipit in mid-flight at Pipit Hill
in Yuma County on Oct. 5 DFO field trip
Dave Prentice